

THE AEROPLANE BOYS SERIES

THE STOLEN AEROPLANE

ASHTON LAMAR



George Kenneth Killen
Lake City,
Minnesota

The Aeroplane Boys Series

The Stolen Aeroplane

OR

How Bud Wilson Made Good

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"STOP! IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!" (See page 185.)

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OR

How Bud Wilson Made Good

BY

ASHTON LAMAR



Illustrated by M. G. Gunn

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THE STOLEN AEROPLANE

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The Stolen Aeroplane

OR,

How Bud Wilson Made Good

CHAPTER I

AN IDLE BOY GETS A JOB.

“Here she comes.”

Doug' Jackson, the driver of the Scottsville House 'bus, rose from the edge of the depot platform, hitched up his trousers, and motioned the usual depot loungers back to safety. All were waiting for passenger train No. 22, west bound, due at 11:15 A. M., and late, as usual.

“She 's made up seven minutes,” Doug' announced authoritatively after consulting a large silver watch. “She 's fannin'—git back there, you kids.”

No one else yet saw or heard the approaching train, whose proximity was only detected by Doug's long experience in such matters; but all necks were craned toward the grade east of town and the curve at its far end.

One of these anxious watchers was Mr. Josiah Elder, a man just beyond middle age, who shaved every morning down to a round patch of whiskers on a prolonged chin, and whose white starched shirt and heavy gold watch chain proclaimed him a person of affairs. Just at present, a heavy coat of dust on a new, black, soft hat and on his dark trousers suggested that the morning had been spent out of doors, where the September drought had coated the town and country with suffocating dust.

Mr. Elder was president of the Scottsville First National Bank. He was also president of the Scott County Joint Stock Agricultural and Trotting Association. And this was Wednesday morning of fair week. The president was hot, dusty, and had an anxious look.

"Hello, Mr. Elder," exclaimed Doug' hastily, lifting his cap with his badge as "runner" on it, and glancing hastily along the track to be sure that his announcement had not been premature. "Train 'll be here right away."

"Morning," replied the anxious fair official, looking toward a dusty, side-bar buggy and a lively looking horse hitched just beyond the 'bus. "Keep your eye on my rig, Doug'."

Just then a hollow whistle sounded far up the

track, and a moment later, beneath a puff of white steam that drifted around the curve, a billow of black smoke told that No. 22 was "fanning" down grade toward the town.

"I 'm lookin' for a man named Dare—T. Glenn Dare. If you see him, he ain't goin' to the hotel. He 's goin' with me."

"What 's the prospec's fur fair week?" asked Doug', indicating that he understood. "I reckon that airship 'll bring out a fine attendance 'bout Thursday."

"We hope so," replied Mr. Elder impressively. "It is a novel attraction of great educational value. And it is an expensive feature. The people o' Scott County should recognize our enterprise and turn out liberally."

"I reckon it 's goin' to kind o' crowd you to git everything in shape on time, ain't it? All the boxes and the injine is over there in the freight house yit."

"We are waiting for Mr. Dare. He 's the manufacturer's agent and operator."

The oncoming train was already pounding over the switch track frogs at the town limits. Doug' mustered up his courage, crowded a little closer to the disturbed fair official and exclaimed, nervously:

"All right, Mr. Elder, I 'll keep my eye out fur him. And your rig'll be all safe. Say, Mr. Elder, you could n't spare me a ticket fur the fair, could ye?"

But this appeal was lost. The mogul engine, hissing as if annoyed at its enforced stop in Scottsville, slid to a grinding stop, panted a few times, and then with a sharp clang of its bell and a deep snort, was off again. The crowd, always anxious to see the train come in, edged forward, fell back and grouped itself about a dozen arrivals. Two traveling men, or "drummers," Doug' captured. The others were either not strangers to the depot crowd or easily identified by their luggage and costume as visitors from near by towns. Mr. T. Glenn Dare was not among those who alighted.

Having made sure of this fact, President Elder's strained look at once turned into one of complete annoyance.

"I reckon yer man did n't git here," remarked the talkative 'bus driver. "Maybe he 'll be on seventeen."

One look at the official's face convinced Doug' that it was not the time to renew his request for a free ticket. Mr. Elder hurried into the depot, and with no attempt to restrain his anger, called

up the ticket office of the fair association on the telephone.

To some one, he rapidly explained that Mr. T. Glenn Dare, the expert who was to set up and operate the aeroplane for the fair directors had not arrived. The boxed and crated airship had been in the depot freight house for a week. It was now Tuesday of the week of the fair, and a flight had been advertised for Wednesday afternoon at three o'clock. Operator Dare, who was to make this at the rate of fifty dollars a day, had been expected Tuesday morning.

"Yes, I know," answered the president to the person with whom he had been talking, "we 've saved one hundred dollars, but that ain't it. We 've got to exhibit our aeroplane to-morrow, or let the people know we can't. We 've paid one thousand eight hundred dollars in good money for the thing, and it ain't worth a nickel to us over there in the freight depot."

There was more talk, and then President Elder ended the conversation by announcing:

"There is n't any use to haul the boxes out to the ground, if the man don't come. We 'll wait until the night train. If he ain't on that, we 'll send out bills callin' the show off. Then we 'll ship the machine back East and sue the company

for failure to keep its contract. They agreed to have a competent man here, and they 've thrown us down."

As the perspiring Mr. Elder came out of the hot ticket-office of the musty-smelling station and paused on the platform to wipe his red face, his eye fell on the freight-house across the tracks from the station. He glanced at his horse to see that it was all right, and then sprang across to the freight-depot. He had not yet seen the valuable crates consigned to him. The freight-agent had already gone to dinner. Entering the long shed, he glanced inquiringly about. It was half dark.

"'Lookin' for your aeroplane, Mr. Elder?'" exclaimed a pleasant boyish voice from somewhere in the gloom.

The banker and fair president traced the sounds to their source. At the far end of the room and opposite a rear door stood a mound of carefully packed and braced skeleton-like frames. On the edge of a heavy square box bound with steel bands, sat a boy of perhaps seventeen or eighteen. Although it was hot, the lad was wearing a heavy blue flannel shirt, a red neck tie, and a cheap, sailor hat. His low shoes were worn and old, and his socks gave signs of

needing a mother's care. He was slowly fanning himself with a big blue handkerchief.

"If you are," added the boy, springing to his feet, "here it is; and it looks like the real thing."

Instead of examining the aeroplane crates, Mr. Elder's eye swept the boy from hat to shoes.

"Are n't you Bud Wilson?" he asked at last.

"Yes, sir. Attorney Cyrus Stockwell is my foster father."

"I thought so," rejoined the banker tartly. "I 've heard of you. Lafe Pennington, of our bank, has told me about you."

The boy laughed—he had already taken off his discolored hat.

"Then you did n't hear much good about me, that 's certain."

"No," soberly answered the elder man, "to tell you the truth, I 've never heard much good about you."

The boy laughed again, but in an embarrassed way, showed his confusion, and then said:

"Lafe and I never got along. But, he may be right. I 've got a bad name."

"What are you doing here? You are old enough to be at work."

"That 's it," went on Bud, "I ought to be. I

have a job promised me when I want it, out in the country. But I 've been waitin' to see this."

He pointed toward the dismantled airship.

"What do you want to see? You have n't any business loafing in here. Have you been monkeyin' with the machinery?"

"Oh! I know 'em around here. And I ain't hurt nothing. No fear o' that."

"Well, what 's your interest?"

"I want to see it. I 've been waiting every day since it came. I want to be here when you move it. I want to help unpack it."

"You? What do you know about aeroplanes?"

"Nothing—that is, almost nothing. But I guess I know a little. You know I ran Mr. Greeley's automobile nearly all summer. I understand motors. And—well, I do know something about aeroplanes. I tried to make one this summer."

A look of sudden interest showed in the banker's face.

"Oh, I remember now, you are the youngster that nearly broke his neck trying to fly."

"I suppose Lafe Pennington told that," answered Bud, looking up. "Well, I did n't. I

fell, but I lit on my feet, and I did n't even harm my aeroplane."

President Elder was looking over the big crates, and peering through the frames. Suddenly, he turned to Bud again.

"What do you mean by *your* aeroplane?"

"It was n't really an aeroplane. That is, I did n't have an engine; but I made the wings; and I flew one hundred and fifty feet in them, too, out at Greeley's gravel pit."

"Then you know how an aeroplane is made?"

"I think I do. They are all pretty much alike. When I see this one, I 'll know a lot more."

An idea was plainly working in President Elder's brain. He made a searching examination of the lad before him. Then he asked:

"Did n't you and Lafe Pennington work on this airship idea together?"

Bud laughed outright.

"Hardly," he answered, "Lafe would n't work with any one. He knows too much. I worked alone."

President Elder looked at his watch. It was just noon.

"Do you think you could put this airship together?"

"Certainly, I put my own together."

"Bud, meet me here at one o'clock. I may have a job for you."

While the banker's smart rig went clattering up the brick street, Bud started for home on a run.

Long before one o'clock, Bud was at the freight-house again. In a short time, a dray and an express wagon appeared. About the time that a large farm wagon, drawn by two horses, came in sight, Mr. Elder reappeared. In the buggy with him was the young man referred to several times by Mr. Elder and Bud an hour before—Lafe Pennington. As they sprang from the vehicle, Bud was on the freight-house platform. Lafe passed the boy with a condescending smile; but Mr. Elder stopped.

"Bud," he began, "I had a kind of a notion that I had a job for you, but I guess that 's all off."

"I hoped you had. I hurried back."

"Well, it 's this way. I forgot that our clerk, Mr. Pennington, had some knowledge of aeroplanes. We are in a sort of a box, and after I talked to you, I decided to try to get this machine ready. The man who ought to do it is n't here. Even if he comes to-night, he won't have time to set it up. So, while I talked to you, I decided

to try to put it together and have it ready when he came. I was going to get you to help."

"Can't I?" asked the boy eagerly.

"I don't think we 'll need you now. I 've got Mr. Pennington. He says he can do it without any trouble. And you know he 's in the bank, and I know him. He 's one of our clerks."

"I reckon he can do it, perhaps," answered Bud in a disappointed tone, "but I 'd like to help too. I 'd work for nothing."

"I suggested that, but Mr. Pennington says he'd rather work alone."

Mr. Elder was about to pass on when Bud touched his sleeve.

"Mr. Elder," he said, "Lafe said that because he knew I was the only person in Scottsville who could help. I have n't anything against Lafe, but you ought to know the facts—I know more about aeroplanes than he does. He may be able to do what you want, and he may not. You may think I 'm knocking Lafe, but I 'm not. I 'm just giving you the truth: he thinks he knows more about airships than he really does."

"You seem to feel sure you know it all," almost sneered the banker.

"I should say not," answered the boy

promptly. "I know hardly anything, and Lafe knows less."

"Well, if we get stuck, I suppose we can call on you."

"I 'll be right there, waiting."

"Pshaw," exclaimed the banker laughing, "we need plenty of help. Mr. Pennington may not want you, but I do. Turn in and give us a lift. Between us, we 'll see what we can do. We are going to move these boxes out to the fair-ground, and see if we can put our aeroplane together. You 're hired to help."

CHAPTER II

THE HERO OF THE GRAVEL PIT.

The Scott County Fair-grounds were a mile and a half from Scottsville. A little after two o'clock, the "aeroplane" cavalcade was on its way there from the freight-house. In front, rode President Elder of the fair association, with Lafayette, or Lafe, Pennington, the bank clerk and amateur dabbler in aeronautics, by his side. Then came a dray with the four-cylinder, 25-horse power, 190 lb. Curtiss engine elaborately crated. Next was an express wagon with boxed engine accessories, such as gasoline tank, water cooler, chain drives, and the dismantled propeller blades. In the rear, in the big farm wagon, rode proud Bud Wilson, busy preserving the balance of the spruce sections of the aeroplane surfaces.

In the excitement attendant upon the fair, the procession attracted little attention. Buggies and passenger hacks raised clouds of dust in which wagons laden with belated exhibits made their way toward the great enclosure within whose high white fence Scott County's agricul-

tural exhibit was fast getting into final order. At the sight of President Elder, the gate attendants threw the white portals wide open, and Bud had a new joy—he was working for the fair, and did n't have to pay to get in.

"I never did pay," laughed Bud, speaking to the driver of the wagon, "but this is the first time I ever went in at the main gate."

Winding their way among the plows, self-binders and threshing-machines already in place, and then directly between the two lines of peanut, pop, candy, cider and "nigger baby" stands—already making a half-hearted attempt to attract trade—the aeroplane wagons passed through the heart of the grounds. Near the "grand stand," where for ten cents extra, one might view the trotting and running races, President Elder alighted and personally superintended the unlocking of the gates leading onto the race-track. Across this, the three vehicles made their way.

At the far end of the space within the smooth half-mile race-track was a newly built shed, made according to directions forwarded from the aeroplane factory in New Jersey. In front of this, the wagons halted. There were not many persons in attendance that day on the fair, but

there were enough to make an audience of several hundred at once. The aeroplane shed was a temporary structure—a shed with a board top and canvas sides. Willing hands soon had the different sections of the car either in the house or near by in front.

Lafe Pennington's coat was off, and he superintended the unloading with a great show of authority. By this time, a carpenter and a machinist had arrived, and the officious bank clerk announced that spectators had better be dispersed in order that he might work undisturbed.

"What do you want Bud to do?" asked President Elder.

Lafe smiled feebly.

"Nothing just now," he answered. "He can stay outside and see that we are not disturbed. I don't think it will take us very long."

The confident clerk started to enter the shed.

"How about the starting track and the derrick for the drop weight?" asked Bud innocently. "I don't see any material here for those."

Lafe stopped suddenly, and looked up in surprise.

"Yes, of course," he faltered, "where are they?"

"I don't know what you mean," said President Elder. "I guess everything 's here."

Pennington made a quick survey.

"Oh, they are not here," explained Bud. "I discovered that some days ago."

"You 're right," conceded Lafe. "They must have forgotten them. We 'll have to telegraph for them."

"Telegraph nothing," blurted the president. "We 've no time for telegraphing. They can't get 'em here in time. If it 's something you have to have, I guess we are stuck."

"Perhaps," suggested Bud, "the manufacturers expected you to make this apparatus on the ground. The ropes and automatic release block are here."

"How can we do that?" sneered Pennington, already irritated at the turn affairs were taking.

"Very easily, I imagine," replied Bud, "if they sent specifications. The manufacturer sent word how to build a shed and how big to make it. Did n't they send a letter?" he asked, turning to President Elder.

"Letter? Why, yes—I forgot that—a big letter," exclaimed Mr. Elder, reaching into his inside pocket.

Pennington took it, glanced it over hurriedly, and exclaimed:

"Sure, here it is, sketch, measurement, and all."

"Could n't I look after that?" asked Bud turning from the president to Lafe.

"That 's carpenters' work," answered Pennington at once. "We 'll have the carpenters see to that. They can order the stuff by 'phone at once."

He turned again to begin the work of uncrating the aeroplane.

"How long do you figure it 's going to take to put the car together, Lafe?" asked Bud.

"I don't know," retorted Pennington sharply, "but I 'll get along all the faster if I 'm not stopped to talk about it."

"It ought to be done to-night, should n't it?" queried Bud, turning to the president and showing no irritation.

"Certainly, if possible."

"Then we ought to get some lights—three or four gasoline flares. That work can't be done before dark. It 's going to take all night. It 's a tejus job. And after the frame is set up and made fast, the engine must be tested and anchored and the shafts set."

"Had n't we better get the lights ready?" asked Mr. Elder of Pennington.

"Of course, we 'll need them," answered Pennington, who had in reality not thought of them. "Better let Bud go to town for them."

"All right. Here Bud, take my horse and buggy and go to town, and get what 's needed at Appleton's hardware store. I 'll be at the ticket office when you get back."

Pennington had disposed of his rival temporarily, but Bud took his defeat cheerfully. However, he could not resist the temptation to turn the tables once more.

"Want anything else?" he asked casually as he climbed into the rig.

"Nothing more now," answered Pennington, turning away for the third time.

"You want gasoline for the lamps, don't you?" suggested Bud.

"Certainly—and matches, too," said Lafe with another sneer.

"Well, how about some gasoline for the engine?"

Lafe grew red in the face, and turned away impatiently.

"And some oil for the engine?"

"You don't expect a fellow to think of every-

thing at once, do you?" snorted Lafe. "I have n't been hanging over this thing for a week. I 've had something else to think about."

"Seems as if Bud had done a good deal of thinking," suggested President Elder. "Hurry back, Bud, we may need you again."

Bud Wilson had long been pointed out as the prize example of juvenile perverseness. Many persons, including Lafe Pennington, were in the habit of referring to him as a "bad" boy. But in this, they were wrong. Bud's differences from other boys of better reputation meant no more than that he was headstrong and so full of ideas that the routine of school went hard with him. The boy often shocked his teacher. Instead of the old-fashioned speaking pieces, Bud was apt to select some up-to-date newspaper story or verse. Once he even ventured to recite some poetry of his own, in which Miss Abbott, the teacher, did not particularly shine.

When he was left an orphan and went to live with Attorney Cyrus Stockwell, the lively youngster gave up most of his school hours to drawing engines. At that time, he planned to be an engineer. Succeeding that, he aspired to be a detective. In this new ambition, he read a great deal of literature concerning crime. But

this new profession was soon forgotten with the advent of aeroplanes. From the moment Bud realized what a heavier-than-air flying-machine meant, he was a rapt disciple of the world's new aviators.

Verses of his own and detective stories were now forgotten. Given the task of writing an essay, by Miss Abbott, for some lapse of discipline, he produced a wonderful composition on "The Airship." It was so full of Jules Verne ideas that Miss Abbott visited Bud's foster father, and suggested that something be done with the boy.

The something that Attorney Stockwell did was to take Bud out of school and put him at work on rich Mr. Greeley's farm, where, for a time, he labored in a gravel pit shovelling. Learning to operate the steam shovel, he became the engineer, and after that, for some months in the summer, he had been Mr. Greeley's chauffeur. Just now he was back home without a job, and a half promise of another try at school when it opened.

Lafe Pennington was everything Bud was n't. He graduated from the high-school, and was a clerk in the First National Bank. He was popular with the young ladies, and already wore a

moustache. Lafe's interest in aeronautics was older than Bud's, but his knowledge was largely superficial. Young Pennington's information did not extend much further than what he had written in an essay he read before the Scottsville Travel and Study Circle. This paper, entitled "The Development of the Aeroplane," had been printed in the *Globe-Register*. Ever since its publication, Lafe had been trying to live up to the reputation it had brought him.

When Bud Wilson read the article, he at once pronounced it a "chestnut," and declared that it was copied almost wholly from a magazine and an old one at that. Bud repeated this statement to Lafe himself on the memorable occasion when the aeroplane or glider dumped Bud.

While running the steam shovel at Greeley's gravel pit, Bud had the long summer evenings to himself. There was a tool house, plenty of lumber, and, what prompted the manufacture of the small aeroplane, several long, steep switch tracks running down into the pit. After several weeks of work, based on a mass of magazine photographs, newspaper clippings, and scientific paper detailed plans, Bud finally constructed a pretty decent looking bi-plane airship, complete in all respects except as to the engine. It was a

combination of the Curtiss planes and the Wright rudders, with some ideas of Bud's in the wing warping apparatus.

This work was done in the abandoned engine house on the slope of the gravel hill above the pit. Lafe learned of the experiment through Mr. Greeley, who was rather proud of his young engineer, and who did not fail to talk about the amateur airship to those in the bank.

As chief aviation authority in Scottsville, Lafe felt it his duty to investigate. And, to Bud's annoyance, the bank clerk made his first visit to the gravel pit on a Saturday afternoon just as Bud was about to make a trial flight.

"What do you think of her?" asked Bud proudly.

Lafe screwed up his mouth.

"Pretty fair, for a kid. But what 's the sense of it? You have n't an engine, and I reckon you never will have one."

"What 's the good of it?" repeated Bud. "I suppose you know the heavier-than-air car—the aeroplane—was developed before the experimenters had any power. If the Wright Brothers had waited for an engine, they 'd never had a machine. The thing is to know how to fly. You can only learn by flying."

Lafe smiled in a superior way.

"All right," he laughed. "Go ahead. I 'll see that you have a decent funeral."

Lafe even helped Bud carry the fragile frame down to the head of the switch track grade where Bud had a small tool car—no larger than a hand car. On this the motorless planes were deposited, and when Bud had taken his place on his stomach on the lower frame, an idle workman gave the car a shove.

To young Pennington's gratification, the experiment was a fiasco. Even after several trials, it was found that the car would not get up sufficient momentum. The model would not leave the moving platform. Finally, Bud got grease for the car wheels, and then stood up with his arm pits resting on the light framework. As the car reached the bottom of the incline, the boy sprang forward. For one moment, the surfaces caught and held the air and the planes seemed about to rise. Then, with a sudden twist, the frame sprang sideways and downward. Bud's feet struck the gravel and he stumbled. To keep from mixing up with the car, he hurled it from him. The aeroplane sank down with only a few strains, but Bud landed on the side of his face.

The following Saturday, as a sort of a chal-

lenge, Bud invited Lafe and a reporter for the *Globe-Register* to witness his second attempt. This time he abandoned the car. The gravel pit had been cut into the side of the hill. At the edge of the pit, there was a sharp drop of nearly fifty feet. When his guests were ready, Bud had them raise the light car—only twenty feet long—on his shoulders. Balancing the planes, he gripped the lower struts, and before Lafe or the reporter had time to protest, he ran a few feet down the slope—the car had been removed to the old engine house on the hill at the brink of the pit—and stumbled over the precipice.

His guests caught their breaths. But Bud did not fall. When he reached the gravel bed at the bottom, he had flown one hundred and fifty feet, and he came down easily and safely. It was the account of this in the *Globe-Register*, under the title of "First Aeroplane in Scott County" that cemented Lafe's jealousy of Bud's nerve.

CHAPTER III

SCOTTSVILLE'S FAIR SECURES AN AVIATOR.

When Bud returned from town, he had a buggy full of material—three large cans of gasoline, three gasoline flare torches, oil, waste, and—what proved to be most essential—his scrap book of airship pictures and plans. Everything was confusion in the airship shed. The crowd had pretty well cleaned out, but Lafe Pennington and his two assistants did not seem to be working with any more ease because of this.

On top of a box, the manufacturer's drawings and directions were spread out. One thing only seemed to have been accomplished; everything was uncrated.

"Put the stuff down, and don't bother us," exclaimed Lafe at once. "There are too many in here now. I won't need you any more."

Before he took his departure, Bud made a hasty examination. Apparently everything was being done backward. Pennington's eagerness to unpack and to knock boxes apart had made a chaos out of the shed interior. There were no signs of work on the ascending track and weight derrick.

"Sure you don't want me to get that track started?" Bud asked.

"See here, Bud, you seem to have that track on the brain. I'll set it up in a couple of hours when I get around to it."

"Oh," answered Bud, with a smile, "I thought it might take longer." The dismissed boy re-entered the buggy, and drove to the ticket office at the gate. Mr. Elder appeared in a short time with the Superintendent of the Grounds. The possibility of keeping faith with the public by flying the aeroplane the next afternoon was under discussion.

"There 's a powerful lot to be done, even if Mr. Dare gets here to-night," commented Superintendent Perry.

"How does it look to you, Bud?" asked President Elder, turning to the boy—they were all standing by the buggy. Bud said nothing.

"That 's what I think, too," spoke up the superintendent. "I 've been over to the shed twice this afternoon. Mr. Pennington may be a fine bank clerk—and I guess he 's all right at that—but he don't strike me as no aeroplaner. I 'm afeared we 've bit off more 'n we can chew in this deal."

"Is he going to be able to finish the job?" asked Mr. Elder, turning to Bud again.

"Perhaps. If he works all night."

"All night?" exclaimed Superintendent Perry.

"Them mechanics 'll not stick all night. They 're gettin' ready to quit now."

Mr. Elder sighed.

"Well, let him go ahead until the eight o'clock train gets here. If the expert ain't on it, I guess we 'll call it off. We made a big mistake not hirin' that Roman Hippodrome and Wild West Congress, but it 's too late now."

Bud rode to town with Mr. Elder, after watching his horse for an hour, and went sorrowfully home. But he was by no means as despondent as the Fair Association President. His brain had been working all afternoon. When the eight o'clock train came in without the eagerly longed for Mr. Dare, Bud was at Mr. Elder's elbow. The president was boiling mad.

"I see he did n't come yit," ventured the all-observing 'bus driver, Doug' Jackson. "Ef he gits here on the one o'clock, I reckon I 'd better call you up and let ye know?"

This willingness to oblige was leading up to another appeal for a pass, but Doug' got a cold reception.

"Need n't bother," responded Mr. Elder curtly. "I 'm done with these easterners and Mr. Dare."

He was hurrying to his buggy when Bud touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Elder," said the boy, in a businesslike tone, "I 'm pretty young to make any suggestions to you, but I can help you out of your trouble. I 'm sure of it."

The angry fair official paused.

"Lafe Pennington is doing what he 's always done—when it comes to this airship business—"

"Four flushin'," interrupted Mr. Elder. "I know that."

"I would n't put it that way," added Bud, "but he 's doin' what Mr. Perry says—he 's bit off more 'n he can chew."

"Well, what then? It don't matter much. Our flyin' man ain't here, and don't look as if he 'd be here."

"I can chew it."

Mr. Elder shrugged his shoulders.

"From what I hear, you and Lafe are always knockin' each other," he commented.

"That 's right. I 've got a reason, and he has n't. I can deliver the goods, and he can't. That 's all."

“What are you tryin’ to git at?”

“Put me in charge of that work out there, and by noon to-morrow, I ’ll have that aeroplane ready to fly.”

“Alone?” said the man, after a moment’s thought and turning on the boy suddenly.

“By noon, if I have carpenters to do what I need, and earlier if Lafe will help.”

“Would you work with Mr. Pennington?”

“Certainly. He ’s all right if he has some one with him who knows. I know—I ’ve figured this all out.”

The puzzled official was plainly in a quandary. Then he shook his head.

“What if you did? What ’s the us of all this fussin’ and rushin’ around? This feller to run it ain’t here, and we can’t count on him now.”

“I ’ll do it.”

Mr. Elder’s mouth opened.

“You mean go up in the machine?”

“Yes.”

“And risk breakin’ your neck?”

“Hundreds are doing that every day. Has n’t been but two men broken their necks yet.”

“You ’re foolish.”

“May be. But I ’ll do it if you ’ll give me the chance.”

The suggestion was too daring for President Elder to pass on at once and alone. He lit a cigar, looked at his watch, examined Bud in the glare of the depot light, and then went into the station and telephoned to some one. When he came out, he motioned the boy to follow him, unhitched his horse and told Bud to jump into the buggy. Before he spoke they were on their way to the fair-grounds once more.

"What makes you think you can do this? I thought you had to be an expert?"

"Experts always have to have a first experience. There is n't any half bites. It 's whole hog or none," answered Bud.

"You had a half bite when you tumbled in the gravel pit," laughed his companion.

"No, sir," answered the boy. "That was riskier than this. I took more chances when I jumped off the hill than I 'll be takin' here."

"You 'll have to git your father's consent," suggested the president as that thought struck the cautious banker. "If we try it, we can't afford to be sued for damages."

"I have n't any father."

"Well, your guardian's—I forgot. You 'll have to sign an agreement waiving all claims."

"I 'll do that, and I 'll do more. This expert

was to get fifty dollars a day. I 'll work for nothing."

"Why?"

Bud was silent a little spell. Then he answered.

"Because every one says I 'm a tough kid just because I 'ditched' school a few times. I 've never had a chance. I could n't even get work except in a gravel pit. I 'm anxious to 'make good' in this town."

The road to the fair-ground was now pretty well deserted. Inside the exhibition enclosure, the white tents and the little fires glowing here and there under the trees gave the place the appearance of a hunter's camp in the woods. Hastening forward in the dark, Mr. Elder drove at once into the center of the race track. To his and to Bud's surprise, there was no glare of light from the airship shed. They had expected to find the place the center of activity.

"I reckon Mr. Pennington 's gone to supper," suggested Bud.

"Maybe he 's given up," said the president.

"You 're both wrong," exclaimed a voice out of the blackness. "I 've just been over trying to get you or Superintendent Perry on the 'phone," went on the unseen speaker, who was

easily recognized as Pennington. "I can finish the job all right, but to be dead sure, I guess I ought to have some help."

A few minutes later, they were at the shed, and Lafe and the watchman lit the lanterns.

"That 's what we concluded," said Mr. Elder in a decisive tone. "And I 've brought Bud back. I guess you fellows had better work together."

"That 's all right," replied Lafe. "I was going to suggest Bud."

The latter was already at work; his hat was off, his shirt was off and his undershirt sleeves were rolled up to the elbows. He was heating and lighting the gasoline torches.

"Oh, it 's all right now, Mr. Elder. We 'll get along fine together, and you can go home and rest in peace. We 'll deliver the machine on time," began Bud enthusiastically. "You won't disappoint the people."

"Did Mr. Dare come?" asked Lafe, already greatly relieved in getting out of his mess so easily.

Mr. Elder shook his head.

"No. And I ain't countin' on him now. Looks like we won't need him."

"How 's that?" asked Lafe, puzzled.

"If it comes to the worst, Bud says he can fly the thing."

"Bud?"

"Why not? I 'm sort o' persuaded he can. I 'm goin' to see the directors about it to-night. He 's willing to try."

Lafe's face turned red and white with anger and surprise. He stammered and trembled.

"I think that 's a pretty raw deal, Mr. Elder, after what I 've done. If any one gets that chance, I think I ought."

"Did you want to go up in it?"

"Of course. I had no other idea, if the operator did n't come. I was going to ask as soon as it was certain he could n't get here. I think I 've had a pretty hard turn down."

He was lying, and his indignation was largely assumed. But his jealousy of Bud made him desperate.

Mr. Elder was puzzled. He looked from one lad to the other.

"How about it, Bud?" he asked at last. "Looks as if you were sort of second fiddle, don't it?"

Bud hesitated, wiped his hands on a bit of waste and then smiled.

"You did n't say I could do it," he answered

at last, "though I 'm ready to try. If you 'd rather have Lafe, all right. I 'll help get her ready just the same. Don't let me make any trouble."

The fair official looked relieved. From a dearth of aviators, he now had an over supply of them.

"Maybe Judge Pennington won't consent to your reskin' your neck, Lafe," he commented.

"I 'm of age," answered Lafe, "and can do what I like."

"And you think you can work it?"

There was a plain sneer on Lafe's face.

"I guess I know as much about it as any one around here, even if I have n't fallen out of one."

"Maybe your fall's comin'," interrupted Bud, with a broad grin.

"Well, settle it between you. We 'll count on one of you. I 'll go to town and tell the other directors."

"Give it to him—give Lafe the chance if he wants it," volunteered Bud suddenly and significantly.

"You give up quick enough, I notice," exclaimed Lafe somewhat nervously. "I reckon you ain't afraid, are you?"

“Not so you can notice it,” retorted Bud.

“Then we ’ll count on you, Lafe,” concluded President Elder.

“Much obliged,” was Lafe’s answer, but it lacked a good deal of being enthusiastic.

As soon as Mr. Elder’s buggy disappeared in the darkness, Lafe wheeled toward Bud.

“You did that on purpose, Bud Wilson, just to get me in a box.”

“You jump out, and let me in,” was Bud’s sober rejoinder.

CHAPTER IV

A MIDNIGHT LUNCH.

"When you see me doing that, just tell me," retorted Lafe, with another sneer.

"All right," answered Bud, "I will."

Surrounded by a wilderness of odds and ends, the youthful rivals stood and faced each other. Finally, Bud reached out his hand.

"What 's the use of scrappin' Lafe? I guess we don't like each other any too well, but we ought not let our grouch interfere with our chance."

"What chance have you?" asked the bank clerk.

"Just a chance to get my hands on a real aeroplane. And that 's all I want. But I won't have that if we don't stop quarrelin' and get to work."

"Looks to me as if you thought I 'd back out."

"That 's up to you," went on Bud. "I did n't say so."

"Are you willing to take orders and do as I say?"

"Sure," answered Bud. "All I want is to see

the thing fly. And, since you are the aviator, I say 'Good luck to you.' "

Lafe had ignored the proffered hand, but he now relented a little.

"I want to be fair," he said half-heartedly, "and I 'll meet you half way. But I don't intend to work all night to give you a chance to show off to-morrow."

"Never fear," answered Bud. "I had hopes for a minute, but they were like all my other chances." And he whistled. "You 're it and I 'm nit. Come on, let 's forget our troubles."

As he smiled and held out his hand again, Lafe had not the heart to refuse it.

"Now," went on Bud enthusiastically as the two lads limply clasped hands, "we 're on the job. What 's doin'?"

Within a few minutes, the rivalry was forgotten, at least temporarily. The only headway made so far was in the mounting or setting up of a few sections of the frame. More than half of the work was yet to be done; the front and rear rudders were to be attached and levers adjusted; the vulcanized silk covering of the two planes had to be put in place and stretched; the landing skids bolted on; the engine, gasoline tank, and water cooler put in place and tested; the bat-

teries wired; the propellers and shafts located; the chain gears and guards attached, and, possibly most important, the starting rail and weight derrick constructed. And it was then nine o'clock.

"Let 's get started right," suggested Bud, "now that you have everything unpacked. Before we go any further let 's see where we stand"

As a result of a nearly thirty-minute conference, these were the conclusions: A mechanic must be found at once, if possible, to adjust the engine, oil it and get it running; a carpenter must also be secured to start to work by midnight on the starting track; these things arranged for, the two amateurs agreed that, together, they could have the aeroplane itself so far set up by daylight as to give assurance to the fair directors that the day's program could be carried out.

"And then," suggested Lafe, "I suppose T. Glenn Dare will sail in on the noon train and steal our thunder."

"He can't steal mine," laughed Bud. "I 'll have been through this thing by that time from top to bottom. That 's all I want—that, I can get," he added with another laugh.

The first stumbling block was the launching device. This essential part of any aeroplane

flight is usually a single wooden rail about eight inches high, faced with strap iron. As it is necessary with most modern aeroplanes to make a run before sufficient sustentation is secured to force the machine into the air, it is evident that this starting impulse must be secured through an outside force.

The specifications forwarded with the airship purchased by the fair authorities, called for the long wooden rail. On this the aeroplane was to be balanced on a small two-wheeled truck. At the rear end of the rail, the plans called for a small derrick, pyramidal in form, constructed of four timbers each twenty-five feet long and two inches square braced by horizontal frames and wire stays.

At the top and at the bottom of this, were two, pulley blocks with a rope passing around the sheaves a sufficient number of times to provide a three-to-one relation between a 1500-pound weight suspended from the top pulley and the movement of the aeroplane on the track.

The rope, which passes around the pulley at the bottom of the derrick, is carried forward to and around a pulley at the front end of the rail, and thence back to the aeroplane, to which it is attached with a right-angled hook. When every-

thing is ready for an ascension and the operator is in place, the propellers are set to work. When they have reached their maximum revolution and the car begins to feel their propelling force, the weight, usually several bags of sand, is released, the tightened rope shoots through the pulleys and the balanced aeroplane springs forward on its car. By the time it has traveled seventy-five or one hundred feet, the impulse of the falling weight and the lift of the propellers sends it soaring. Thereupon, the hook drops off and the free airship begins its flight.

"We have the plans for the derrick and the track, the pulley blocks, rope and hook," declared Bud at once. "But we have n't the little car."

"Could n't we make one?" ventured Lafe.

"Certainly, but hardly in the time we have."

"I 've heard of aeroplanes ascending by skidding along over the grass," suggested the bank clerk.

"But they were n't in the hands of amateurs. We 'd better stick to the rail. I 've been thinking over this—down there in the freight-house.

"Did you know the track car was n't here?"

"Well, I did n't see it. Here is the idea. The aeroplane has two light, smooth landing runners

or skids. Lumber is cheap. Instead of a track for the wheels we have n't got, we 'll make two grooves just as long as the proposed track. We 'll stake these out on the ground and set the landing runners in them after we 've greased the grooves with tallow. The weight, rope and hook will work exactly as if we had a single track—'n possibly better. Anything the matter with that suggestion?"

Lafe was skeptical a few moments while Bud made a sketch of the new device. Then he conceded that he could see no reason why it would n't work.

"All right," exclaimed Bud, in a businesslike way, "now, you go ahead, and I 'm off for town for the timber and the men we need. You can't do much single handed, of course, but do what you can. I 'll be back before midnight. Then we 'll get down to business."

The boy had no vehicle to carry him the two miles to Scottsville, so he walked. The night was dark, and almost starless, and the pike or road was soft with heavy dust; but, with his coat on his arm, Bud struck out with the stride of a Weston. Covered with dust and perspiration, in about half an hour, he reached the edge of the town. Entering the first open place he found, a

sort of neighborhood grocery, he called up Mr. Elder by telephone.

It required some minutes to fully explain the situation, but finally he convinced the fair official that the things he suggested were absolutely necessary and must be done at once. As a result, by the time Bud reached the town public square, Mr. Elder was waiting for him in the office of the hotel.

The usual "fair week" theatrical entertainment was in progress in the town "opera-house," fakers were orating beneath their street torches, and the square was alive with Scottsville citizens and those already arrived for the fair. It was not difficult for President Elder to start things moving. Within a half hour he had found, and for extra pay, arranged for two carpenters and an engineer to report at the fair-grounds at once.

The securing of the lumber was not so easy and called for some persistent telephoning. Finally an employe of the "Hoosier Sash, Door and Blind Co." was found, and he in turn secured a teamster. At ten-thirty o'clock, Bud was in the lumber yard selecting the needed material with the aid of a smoky lantern, and before eleven o'clock the one-horse wagon was on its way to the fair-grounds. The two carpenters reached

the airship shed about eleven-thirty in a spring wagon with their tools, and a little after twelve o'clock the engineer arrived on foot with a hammer, a wrench and a punch in his pocket.

Before work really began, Bud startled Pennington with a cheery question.

"Say, Lafe, I 'm hungry as a chicken, and I 've only got a dime. Got any money?"

Lafe was not celebrated for generosity.

"I don't see what good money 'll do out here. There 's no place to buy stuff. And it 's midnight anyway."

"If you 'll produce, I 'll get something to eat," said Bud with a grin.

"Here 's a quarter," answered Pennington slowly.

"Gimme a dollar," exclaimed Bud. "I 'll pay it back. I forgot to speak of it to Mr. Elder."

"What do you want with a dollar?" asked his associate, somewhat alarmed. Bud's credit was n't the sort that would ordinarily warrant such a loan.

"Why, for all of us, of course. We can't work all night on empty stomachs. And there 's five of us."

Thereupon, Lafe rose to the occasion and handed Bud a two-dollar bill.

"You can bring me the change," he suggested promptly. "I'll charge it up to the fair officers."

Bud was off in the dark. His hopes of securing something to eat were based on what he had seen passing through the grounds on his way back with the lumber. In several groups under the big trees, he had seen camp-fires. "Concession" owners and their attendants who remained on the grounds during the night had turned the vicinity of the silent tents and booths into a lively camp. In one place, the proprietor of a "red hot" stand had a bed of charcoal glowing, and a supply of toasting sausages on the grill. These were in apparently steady demand by watchmen, hostlers, live stock owners and many others who had not yet retired.

On his way to this stand, Bud passed what he had not observed before. In the rear of a dirty, small tent, an old woman, a man and a woman of middle age were squatted about the dying embers of a fire. Almost concealing both the tent and group was a painted picture, worn and dingy, displayed like a side-show canvas. On this, above the attempt to outline an Egyptian female head, were the words: "Madame Zecatacas, Gypsy Queen. The Future Revealed."

Bud could not resist the temptation to stop a



BUD BARGAINS FOR COFFEE.

moment. The man greeted him with a stare, but the old woman held out a skinny hand. Her brown, wrinkled face was almost repulsive. A red and yellow handkerchief was wound around her head, and her oily, thin black hair was twisted into tight braids behind her ears, from which hung long, brassy-looking earrings. In spite of her age, she was neither bent nor feeble.

As the low fire played on the gaudy colors of her thick dress, she leaned forward, her hand still extended.

"Twelve o'clock, the good-luck hour," she exclaimed in a broken voice. "I see good fortune in store for the young gentleman. Let the Gypsy Queen read your fate. Cross Zecatacas' palm with silver. I see good fortune for the young gentleman."

There was something uncanny in the surroundings, and Bud was about to beat a retreat, when the man exclaimed:

"Got a cigarette, Kid?"

In explaining that he had not, Bud's eyes fell on the rest of the group. A little girl lay asleep with her head in the middle-aged woman's lap. The man held a tin cup in his hand. On the coals of the fire stood a coffee pot.

"Got some coffee, there?" asked Bud abruptly.

The man grunted in the negative. The old woman punched the coals into a blaze.

"Give you fifty cents, if you 'll make me a pot full," said Bud.

The little girl's mother looked up with interest.

"What kind o' money?" drawled the man.

"Part of this," said Bud displaying Lafe's two-dollar bill.

The man reached out his hand.

"Got the change?" Bud inquired.

The old woman reached under her dress and withdrew her hand with a bag of silver coin.

"We 're over in the track working on the airship," explained Bud with no little pride. "When it 's ready bring it over. You can see the aeroplane."

In the matter of food, Bud secured not only "red hots," sandwiches and dill pickles, but a few cheese and ham sandwiches. Altogether he expended a dollar and twenty-five cents of Lafe's money.

"Here you are," he exclaimed on his return, while the new workmen grinned and chuckled, "hot dogs and ham on the bun. Coffee 'll be here in a few minutes."

CHAPTER V

MADAME ZECATACAS READS THE FUTURE.

The workmen assisting Lafe and Bud did not wait for the coffee. The last of the appetizing sandwiches had disappeared when the male member of Madame Zecatacas' outfit came shambling along with the pot of neither very fragrant nor very strong coffee.

"Help yourselves, boys," suggested Bud, offering the workmen their only drinking vessel—a tin water cup. "We 'll try to have a better breakfast."

Lafe, who had worked steadily and energetically all night, was sitting on a box taking a breathing spell. Bud, as a further reward to the coffee bearer, was attempting to show the sour-looking stranger some details of the aeroplane and hastening in his explanation, for there was plenty of work to be done. About the time he had finished, there was a sharp exclamation just outside the shed.

"Move on. What are you doing hanging around here?"

It was Pennington speaking in a brusque voice.

"Twelve o'clock, the good-luck hour," a woman's voice responded. "I see good fortune in store for the young gentleman. Let the Gypsy Queen read your fate. Cross Zecatacas' palm with silver. I see good fortune for the young gentleman."

"Get out, you faker," exclaimed Lafe.

"She 's all right," interrupted Bud. "She 's the Gypsy Queen. She 's Queen Zecatacas, and she made the coffee for us."

"Well, it 's no good anyway," retorted Lafe. "And I reckon we 've had enough visitors for one day."

The old woman seemed not to hear the words. She was looking beyond Pennington and into the brilliantly lighted airship house, where, in the glare of the torches and lanterns, the fragile and graceful frame of the aeroplane had at last assumed shape.

"Beat it," added Lafe authoritatively, "and don't bother us any more. We 're busy."

The aged gypsy did not take her eyes from the skeleton of the airship. To Bud, the shadowed fortune teller seemed like a person in a trance. Without replying to Lafe or moving, she spoke, suddenly, in a strange tongue, to the man with her. He answered angrily in the same language.

She stretched forth a bare, lean arm and pointing toward the aeroplane spoke again. The man replied, more at length this time, and as if in explanation.

"She wants to know what it 's all about," volunteered one of the carpenters who was nearest the apparently transfixed woman.

The man laughed with a sort of sneer.

"Don't you fool yourself. She reads. She knows. But she never seen one."

"Well, we ain't on exhibition now," spoke up Lafe. "You and the old lady have your pay. We 'll excuse you."

"What you so sore about, Lafe?" interrupted Bud. "I don't see that they 're doin' any harm. I think we ought to thank 'em for makin' us a pot of coffee at midnight."

Before Pennington could make reply to this, Zecatacas, the Queen of the Gypsies, took a step forward. Something seemed to make her look bigger—perhaps it was the light, which now fell full on her face. Bud stepped back. It was a face full of creepy power. Chanting, the woman spread her long fingers before her and mumbled:

"The old Gypsy Queen has read the Book of Fate many years. Across the seas, she foretold how man would soar like a bird. What she fore-

told has come to pass. Not for gold nor silver did the Book of the Future open to her. She dreamed the dream of what would come to pass. To-morrow Zecatacas will look upon what she foretold across the seas."

"Sure," interrupted Bud, anxious to change the subject, "come to me, and I 'll get you a front seat—free. When did you predict that there 'd be airships?"

"Rubbish," exclaimed Lafe, glaring at the old fortune teller. "If you feel better now, you 'd better duck and get to bed."

To neither of these speeches did the gypsy seem to give the slightest heed.

"What is written in the Book of the Future will be. I see men flying over forest and mountain. Faster than birds they mount into the clouds. The clouds are dark, the sky is black. I see—the Gypsy Queen sees death."

"Get out, you old hag," roared Lafe, angered at last beyond control, "or I 'll fire you out."

With a cat-like spring, the gypsy leaped forward, caught Lafe's extended arm in a vice-like grip, and before the young man knew what she was doing, or could prevent it, she had opened his clenched fist and shot a lightning-like glance at his exposed palm. As the half frightened and

trembling Lafe jerked his hand from her grasp, the fortune teller hissed at him:

“You spit upon the Gypsy Queen. She puts upon you no curse. But the Line of Fate tells much. Beware! Zecatacas tells nothing. For him who spits upon her, she sees all evil and woe. There is more, the sky is black, but old Zecatacas tells nothing. Beware!”

With the last word, the old woman disappeared into the darkness. Before Lafe could make reply to her, the man, picking up his coffee pot, exclaimed:

“I was just goin’ to hand you a swipe for your freshness, young fellow, but I guess the old woman has given you enough to think about.”

“What do you mean?” blurted out Lafe, making a show of resentment and swaggering up to the man. The latter reached out a brawny hand and pushed Pennington aside.

“I mean what I said. I ain’t no Romney. But, I don’t cross the old lady. She ain’t handin’ out no hoodoo curses; but—well, the long and short of it is, she’s got her fingers crossed on you. Them gypsies has sure got somethin’ up their sleeves we ain’t an’, whatever it is, I would n’t give you a nickel for your luck while she ’s sore on you.”

Then he too was gone. The same talkative carpenter, for all had suspended work while the incident was taking place, felt called upon to make a remark.

"I knowed a Gypsy 'at put a charm on a feller I worked with onct an' he fell off 'n a roof an' purt nigh kilt hisself."

"And I heard of a colored voodoo doctor," broke in Bud, "who put a curse on a coon, and the doctor himself was arrested for chicken stealin'. So you see there ain't much to be scared about." He attempted to liven things with a peal of laughter. But no one joined him. "And as for this old Zecatacas, or Gypsy Queen as she calls herself," he went on, "she makes me tired. Give 'em a quarter and you 're goin' to have good luck and money; turn 'em down, as Lafe kind o' had to do, an' they make an awful bluff about doin' you dirt some way."

"She don't scare me a bit," remarked Pennington, who was yet white and trembling.

"You 'd be a fool if she did," added Bud consolingly. "Any way, it 's all over now. Let 's fall to and get busy."

Pennington had already worked nine hours, and it was not strange that he was tired and nervous. He was restless and irritable, and every

now and then took occasion to say how little he cared for old Zecatacas' words. Bud did what he could to belittle the gypsy's disturbing speech. At three o'clock, Lafe lay down and slept until six, when he, Bud and the three men closed the shed and, on another advance from Lafe, managed to secure an early breakfast at a boarding tent erected for the stock attendants. Newly fortified with food and a wash up, they were back to work at seven o'clock.

Pennington had grown a little more affable, and as the end of their labors now came in sight, he was even at times in a good humor. But Bud saw that either old Zecatacas' speech or something else disturbed Lafe. At eight o'clock, when President Elder arrived, it was seen that, whether expert Dare arrived or not, the aeroplane would be ready by about eleven o'clock.

"How did you young fellows settle it?" were Mr. Elder's first words, after a gratified look into the airship shed.

"Mr. Pennington has it," answered Bud promptly.

"No hard feelings?" added the official, with a smile.

"Smooth as pie," explained Bud. "Only, if

the chance ever comes, I 'd like a try at it—when I ain't in any one's way."

"Still think you can sail her?" said Mr. Elder, turning to Pennington.

"Yes," replied the latter, "it looks easy enough. Of course, there is a certain risk, but I 'll chance that. Only," and he spoke as if the thought had just come to him, "I wish I 'd had more rest last night. I 'm pretty tired, and you know a fellow ought to be at his best."

"Yes," explained Bud, "he worked a good deal longer than the rest of us." He did n't say anything, however, about Pennington's three hours' sleep. "Of course, he feels it more."

"Perhaps you 'd better wait until to-morrow, Lafe, when you 've had a good night's sleep. How would it do for Bud to make the first trial? He seems fresh enough."

"Oh, I 'm all right—I guess," answered Pennington. "You can count on me. By the way, you did n't hear from Mr. Dare, did you?"

"Not a peep."

"I 'll be ready."

Before nine o'clock, two more directors appeared, almost together. They were Lafe's father, Judge E. Pennington (in reality only a

Justice of the Peace), and Bud's foster father, Attorney Cyrus Stockwell.

"Bud," began Attorney Stockwell angrily, why did n't you send us word you were going to stay out all night?"

"To tell you the truth," answered Bud without any great alarm, "I did n't know it when I left home, and after I got out here, I did n't have a chance."

"They tell me you offered to go up in this thing," continued the attorney, jerking his thumb toward the now practically completed air craft.

"Offered!" exclaimed Bud. "I begged to. But I got left. Lafe beat me to it."

"Lafe?" exclaimed Judge Pennington, "Lafe going up in the airship?"

"I agreed to," exclaimed young Pennington. "If the operator don't come, they 've got to have some one. And I know more about it than any one else around here."

"And you 've promised to commit suicide in that death trap?" added Judge Pennington hastily.

"I—I did n't see what else I could do," faltered Lafe.

"Well, I can," broke in his father, "and mighty quick. You can stay out of it."

"Judge," interrupted Attorney Stockwell, "I don't see any cause to worry. Bud tells me he is anxious to take Lafe's place."

"Bud Wilson?" sneered the Judge. "What call has he to try such a thing?"

"Oh, none, except he 's been up in one once. I never heard that Lafe had," retorted the piqued lawyer. Attorney Stockwell had no particular concern for Bud and certainly no affection for him. Later, Judge Pennington said he reckoned the lawyer rather wanted Bud to turn aviator and break his neck in the bargain. But, this morning, the lawyer resented Lafe's superiority.

"I guess if Lafe had tried to fly, he would n't have tumbled out on his head," snorted the Judge. "I don't approve of sending boys up just because we made this fool arrangement. But, when it comes down to who 's entitled to do the thing and who 's got the real grit, I guess it 'll be my own boy."

Bud was watching Lafe. He expected to see his rival swell up with pride and elation. On the contrary, he was sure that he detected signs of disappointment in young Pennington.

"He don't seem to be hankerin' after the job," was the attorney's next shot.

"Lafe," exclaimed his father belligerently, "did Mr. Elder select you for this work?"

"He did."

"Then you do the job, or I 'll know why."

"I thought it was all settled," interposed Bud in a calm voice. "I ain't makin' any fuss about it. I ain't claimin' the right."

"Then you won't be disappointed," snapped the judge, and he bustled angrily away.

"Bud?" asked the Attorney in a low voice, as Lafe walked away, "how much are you to get for workin' all night?"

"Not a cent. It 's like goin' to school to me."

"You 're crazy. Workin' all night for nothin'? Why that 's expert service, an' it ought to be double pay, too."

"I did it for fun," explained Bud, with a laugh.

"Fun?" snapped the lawyer. "You would n't think it so funny if you had to pay for your board and clothes."

"I never asked you to do either," replied Bud. "I don't know why you do. You just took me in. If you 're tired of me, I 'll stay away. But I have n't any money to pay you."

"Stay away," sneered the lawyer. "Where 'd you stay? You have n't a home."

"Wherever there 's aeroplanes," answered Bud calmly, "that 's my job now."

"Still," said the Attorney in a milder tone, "I don't want to be hard on you. You had better come back to us until you are able to care for yourself."

"Thank you," answered Bud. "I hope that won't be long."

When his foster father had followed after Judge Pennington, Bud turned to Lafe. The latter was lying on a long packing case.

"Sleepy?" asked Bud.

"Pretty tired," replied Lafe. "Do you think you can finish up now? I believe I ought to go home and go to bed for an hour or so before afternoon. I 've got to be on edge, you know."

"Sure," said Bud sympathetically. "You do that. I 'll put the last touches on everything. If you get back here by two o'clock, that 's time enough?"

Just before twelve o'clock, President Elder drove up to the airship shed.

"Well," he announced, "he did n't come. Our expert failed to arrive. It 's up to Lafe. Where is he?"

"He 'll be here," answered Bud. "We 're all ready, and he 's gone home for a little rest."

About one-thirty o'clock, President Elder visited the aeroplane headquarters again. Bud was greasing the starting grooves.

"Bud," began the fair official with a faint smile, "I knew it all the time. It 's you or no exhibition. Lafe Pennington is in bed, sick. He 's got a nervous chill."

CHAPTER VI

THE GYPSY QUEEN'S TALISMAN.

Thursday and Friday were usually the big days at the fair in point of attendance; but, owing no doubt to the novel exhibition so widely advertised to begin this day, long before noon it was apparent that the directors had made a wise investment when they spent eighteen hundred dollars for an aeroplane. The pike leading to the fair-ground lay beneath a cloud of dust, the hitch racks were full, and, on the basis of number of visitors, the exhibition was really in full blast a day ahead of time.

The last touches were hastily put on the exhibits in the Agricultural, Floral and Machinery Halls; the ice cream, candy, peanut and red lemonade stands made a brave show of their wares; the "nigger baby" and cane rack barkers began appealing to young and old alike to try their luck, and by noon, thousands of pushing, tired and perspiring people attested that the fair was already in full swing.

The "three minute" trot and "free for all" running races were carded for the afternoon, be-

ginning at two o'clock; and the big event, the startling, stupendous and spectacular flight of the "Twentieth Century Marvel," the aeroplane, was to occur about three o'clock between heats of the races.

The curious spectators did not bother themselves about the airship until after the dinner hour. But, just about the time President Elder announced to Bud that Lafe would not be able to operate the airship, the crowd began to drift toward the field within the race track. By two o'clock, the pressure became so great that Bud, the talkative carpenter who was yet with him, and a special policeman detailed by Superintendent Perry, were forced to drop the canvas side over the front of the house, and devote their time to protecting the starting track or rails.

When the carpenter learned that Lafe was sick and would be unable to direct the flight, he did not hesitate to express his opinion.

"Humph!" he exclaimed. "I guess he's sick, all right. And he began gettin' sick right after that old Gypsy spoke her piece. I don't blame him, neither."

"What 'd you mean?" asked Bud, apparently surprised. You don't mean the old woman scared him?"

"She nigh scart me. You bet she did. Mr. Pennington ain't sick o' overwork. The Gypsy Queen jes' nacherly scart him into a chill."

"I don't believe it," said Bud. "He may be scared—I rather thought myself he was weakenin' this morning, but he 'd be a fool to let a woman put over such a bluff."

The carpenter shook his head.

"I don't know no law agin' his bein' a fool," he added.

Bud made no answer. He knew well enough that the carpenter's theory was right. Whether Lafe had the physical courage to trust himself in the aeroplane Bud had no way of knowing. But his own eyes told him that Pennington had not the moral courage to throw off the prophecy of Zecatacas, the Gypsy Queen. In his heart, he felt sorry for Lafe, for he himself had a most distinct and disagreeable recollection of the Gypsy's depressing prediction.

The first thump of horses' feet on the race track when the "three minute" trotters came out to warm up and the "ding," "ding," "ding," of the warning bell in the judges' stand took away a part of the crowd, but enough remained to put the starting track in constant danger. Finally, Bud managed to secure a long rope,

and the carpenter staked off a pen in front of the shed. This protected the apparatus, but it made Bud conspicuous, and the crowd began to hail comment on him.

"Hey, there, Bud Wilson," shouted a young man. "They 're a givin' it out over yender that you 're goin' up in the airship."

Bud smiled and nodded his head. The crowd pushed forward.

"I reckon yer likely to come down right smart faster nor ye go up," exclaimed a rural humorist.

"Not none o' thet in mine," added another voice. "Not fur love nur money."

"What won't they be a doin' nex?" exclaimed a fourth.

Bud smiled and said nothing. But, just at this time, seeing a familiar figure in the crowd, he sprang forward, lifted the rope and beckoned Madame Zecatacas, the Gypsy Queen, to come inside. She did so, and, while a hubbub of protest and inquiry arose from the crowd, Bud led the picturesquely bedecked fortune teller to the airship shed, lifted the canvas flap and signed to her to enter. The old woman had now none of the creepy, malignant look she exhibited the night before. She was rather fawning than otherwise.

"Look a' here, Madame Zecatacas," Bud began at once, "I reckon you don't know what a commotion you made last night. They say you scared my friend sick."

"The Gypsy Queen sees all things—knows all," began the old woman in her usual singsong. "He who spits on—"

"Oh, see here," interrupted Bud. "He did n't spit on you, and did n't mean anything agin' you. You 're a little touchy ain't you?"

Madame Zecatacas gave him something like the look she gave Lafe the night before. Then her face relaxed into a smile. She ignored the question.

"The young gentleman has a good hand. Money, and the Gypsy Queen will bring him good fortune."

"I ain't got but ten cents," laughed Bud.

The Gypsy scowled.

"Here," he exclaimed hastily. "Don't begin that with me. Don't put any high sign on me. I ain't got time to have a chill."

"The Gypsy Queen can do much."

"I can see that, good enough," answered Bud promptly, thinking of Lafe, "but I have n't the price. If I had, I 'd try you a whirl. I never had my fortune told. See here, Mrs. Zecatacas,

what do I get for lettin' you in here free gratis for nothin'? Right next the airship, too? I 'd think you 'd tell me a few good things just to show there 's no hard feelin'."

The Gypsy tried to scowl again, but Bud's exuberance was too much for her. She reached forward and took his hand.

"Look out now," urged Bud. "Nothin' bum. Don't give me the willies. I got to do my flyin' stunt in a few minutes."

"Long life," began the Gypsy.

"Bully for you," exclaimed Bud. "Now, just tell me I 'll get an education and travel, and have money enough to buy an aeroplane, and we 'll call it square."

"And much trouble—"

"Shut her off," interrupted the boy, with assumed concern. "Come to think of it, I don't need my fortune read. I 'm goin' to make my own."

"A strange man will bring you much trouble—"

"Beware of a dark stranger," laughed Bud. "That 's all right, Mrs. Zecatacas, I 'll watch for him. Now, I 'll show you around a bit and then I guess you 'd better be going."

For a few minutes, Bud explained, as well as

he could, the general features of the aeroplane. In the midst of this, he heard animated talk just outside the canvas door, and, as it was quickly thrown aside, the Scottsville Chief of Police, Matthew Marsh, or Mat Marsh, as he was universally known, stepped inside the tent.

"Hello, Bud," he began. "Heard you was in charge here. An' got company, too. Don't want to make no disturbance, but I 'm lookin' fur your friend." He looked at Madame Zecatacas, and motioned her toward him. "I want you," he added officially. "I got a warrant for you."

The old woman gazed at him in astonishment, and then appealingly at Bud.

"Got a warrant for her!" exclaimed the boy. "What for?"

"Assault and battery," answered Chief Marsh laconically.

"Who 's she assaulted?"

"Judge Pennington issued it on complaint o' his boy."

"Lafe?"

"Yep. Lafe says the old lady jumped on him las' night and assaulted him. Guess it 's right. He 's home in bed."

"That 's a lie," retorted Bud angrily, "and I

don't believe Lafe ever said so. I saw it all. It 's a lie."

"You seen it?" commented the Chief.

"All of it—right here. But there was n't any fight. Nothin' like it."

"I reckon the old lady and her son-in-law better subpoena you fur a witness."

"Has the man been arrested, too?"

The Chief nodded his head.

"When 's the trial?" asked Bud indignantly.

This time, the Chief shook his head the other way.

"You let me know," exclaimed Bud. "I 'm beginnin' to get onto this deal. I want to be there and testify. These people did n't do a thing out of the way. There 's four of us 'll swear to it. This is Judge Pennington's doings."

The Chief wiped his perspiring bald head.

"How do ye figure that?" he said at last.

Bud was silent a few moments, and in each one of these he became more angry. Finally, he burst out in his indignation.

"I ain't blamin' Lafe," he said, "but he talked pretty raw to Mrs. Zecatacas last night, and she handed it right back. An' gypsy-like she talked about hard luck and trouble and things like that 'til Lafe kind o' got cold feet on reskin'

anything to-day. That 's what I think anyway. Now he 's home in bed, sick or scared or both. An' when he told his father about what took place out here, the Judge did n't do a thing but fake up this complaint just to get even. He 's sore because I 've got the chance an' Lafe ain't. I did n't expect to do no knockin', but that 's just the way it 'll all figure out. You can take it right straight from me."

The Chief looked knowingly at Bud, and then closed one eye.

"Bein' an officer o' the law, I ain't takin' sides an' I don't have no opinion. But I heerd what you said. Come on, old lady."

Madame Zacatacas straightened up and glared at the policeman. Bud stepped over and patted her on the shoulder.

"You can't get out of it—now—Mrs. Zecatacas. Go along quietly, and if you want me for a witness or any of the men who were here last night, you tell Mr. Marsh. I 'll come and testify for you."

The gypsy caught his hands in hers, pressed them, and then with a swift movement laid two brown fingers on Bud's forehead. With another swift motion, she pointed to the aeroplane and exclaimed:

"The Gypsy Queen gives you good luck."

This happened in an instant, but before Bud could recover from his surprise, the withered dame reached forth her hand once more, and forced into Bud's palm a small object. Then, without further word, she followed the Chief of Police.

In his fingers, Bud found a heavy ring—dull of color, and yet, apparently not brass. Sunk in the top of it, was a worn, opaque, green stone in the shape of a bug. Bud did not know it, but the stone was a sacred Egyptian scarab.

"Good luck from the Gypsy Queen," repeated Bud, a little upset. "Well, anyway, good or bad, here goes," and he slipped the worn ring upon his third finger.

Outside the shed, Bud found the waiting crowd almost too much for the men on guard, with a new stream thronging toward the aviation grounds from the race-track. At the head of this, marched President Elder, Superintendent Perry and the other officials. Bud knew his part of the day's program was due. He glanced skyward. There was almost no breeze.

"Everything ready?" asked Mr. Elder, in a quick businesslike tone. "It 's just been announced from the judges' stand."

"Ought to hear 'em yell when I told 'em how Mr. Bud Wilson, a product of our own city, would operate the machine," added the Superintendent.

Bud was too busy to parry personal compliments. While Superintendent Perry and the President lifted the canvas front and drove the crowd back, Bud tested the ignition battery, re-oiled the shaft bearings, looked a last time for possible leaks in the gasoline reservoir and then for an instant only, set the engine in motion. As it stopped and the vibrating frame settled back on its trusses, he knew of nothing more to be done.

Outside he could hear the President and the Superintendent shouting commands and exhortations.

"Git back there, now, all o' you, 'at don't want to git hurt. Mr. Wilson 's got to have room. Anybody 'at gits hit 'll be killed. Git back there, everybody. You can all see. 'Taint no horse race. Stand back! The aeroplane will circle around the track. You kin all see. Give us room here," the superintendent kept crying.

"Ladies and gentlemen," added President Elder, mounting the lower brace of the weight derrick. "It is only proper for me to announce

once more that we are only able to make this exhibition to-day through the kindness of a Scottsville boy, Mr. Bud Wilson. The expert who was to operate our aeroplane disappointed us. But, rather than disappoint you, Mr. Wilson has volunteered to risk his life in exhibiting this wonderful invention. I hope you will help him by giving us ample room, and that you will refrain from rushing forward, if there happens to be an accident. We must have no interference, and, on behalf of Mr. Wilson, I ask absolute silence while he is adjusting the aeroplane for its hazardous plunge into space."

A murmur ran through the crowd which, in a moment, died away into an awed silence. The speech and the silence that fell immediately upon the thousands present attracted Bud's attention. He turned from his lingering look at the craft that meant so much to him just in time to find President Elder motioning to him. He stepped to the official's side. As he did so, Mr. Elder sprang from the derrick and laid his hand on Bud's shoulder.

"Ladies and gentlemen," shouted the president in a voice that could be heard at the far edge of the expectant jam, "I take great pleasure in presenting to you Mr. Bud Wilson, our

aviator. Good luck and success to you, Bud," he added, melodramatically taking the boy's hand.

A woman in the crowd sobbed and Bud, red with embarrassment, hastened into the shed.

"What 'd you do that for?" exclaimed Bud, as the President joined him.

"Do what?" laughed Mr. Elder.

"Why shake hands that way and say that. I ain't no circus."

"Excuse me," answered the fair official. "That 's just what you are. This is a show. And we want to make it worth our eighteen hundred dollars."

"Oh, I see."

"And that is n't all. The real performance is yet to come. You don't suppose you 're just going to shoot away in silence. Did you ever see 'em 'loop the loop' in a circus? Well, we 've got that beat a mile. Listen. I 'll release the weight that starts you. When you are ready to get into the car, I 'll get up and tell 'em that any sound may distract you and cause a fatal accident. When they are absolutely still, you 'll take your seat and I 'll take my place at the weight cord. Then I 'll say in a solemn voice: 'When you are ready, Mr. Wilson, say Go.' You 'll look about,

settle yourself, wait a few moments and then, sharp and quick, shout 'Go!' Then if you do go, the crowd 'll feel it has its twenty-five cents' worth."

Bud laughed.

"Funny you did n't bring a pair of tights," he commented.

CHAPTER VII

A FOOLHARDY TRICK IN AN AEROPLANE.

For one moment, a feeling of doubt swept over Bud—not fear of an accident—it was only the first dread of all amateurs—apprehension that his performance might not go off all right. When he glanced out over the thousands waiting to see what was he going to do and realized that all these people were waiting for him—it was enough to give a youngster stage fright. While he paused, he felt Madame Zecatacas' ring, her good luck charm.

“What more does a fellow need?” Bud said to himself. “All ready,” he exclaimed aloud, suddenly reassured, and springing to the center of the aeroplane frame between the engine section and the rear rudder struts, he directed the others in the shed to places along the truss. Then as gently as if moving a man with a broken leg, the long, wiry white planes of the airship were carried out into the full view of the crowd.

The “Ohs” and Ahs” were soon lost in the noise of the shuffling, eager audience. Men and women crowded forward, clouds of dust arose,

and the rope barrier broke before the clamoring spectators. Those carrying the machine could only call out threats until the aeroplane had been deposited over the starting track and the landing skids fitted into the greased grooves. Then Bud sprang onto the fragile frame work. Waving his hand at the people, he shouted:

“The aeroplane is going to shoot straight along this track fast as an engine. If any of you folks get in its way, you ’ll be smashed. There ain’t goin’ to be no start until you all get back and stay back.”

Then he sprang to the ground and for five minutes, he, the president, superintendent and the others helping, struggled with the slowly receding flood of people. At last the rope barrier was re-established and Bud, hot and perspiring, felt that the trial might be safely attempted. As a precaution, he went into the shed and put on his coat. This one act seemed to calm the crowd.

“Goin’ to be cold up in the clouds?” inquired one facetious onlooker.

For answer, Bud fastened the right angled hook attached to the end of the starting rope to the lowest cross brace of the forward rudder frame and then, with the help of the carpenter

and the superintendent, pushed the aeroplane backward on the two tracks until the rope was taut. The bags of sand weighing 1500 pounds were already at the top of the derrick, and the release cord was ready for President Elder's manipulation.

"Don't forget the program," whispered that official, as he stepped by Bud.

"I 'll go you one better," answered the boy, with a smile. Then, recalling what he had often seen in circuses, Bud stepped a few paces forward and looked the car over critically. This was wholly for effect, but with a most concerned face, the young aviator squinted at the ship of the air from two or three angles. Then he mounted the end of the starting rail and looked critically into the sky, even holding up his hand as if to test the air.

"Purty resky business," volunteered one man in the front line.

"Ain't agoin' to take no chances," suggested another.

Then, Bud ignoring, but drinking in with great satisfaction these and many other nervous comments, walked rapidly to the aeroplane, and, with well assumed professional rapidity, felt and shook several braces.

"I reckon he knows what he 's about, all right," Bud heard some one say, and the boy, losing his smile for a moment, wondered if he did.

"Ain't no use puttin' it off longer," he said to himself, and he waved his hand toward the fair president. Mr. Elder at once ascended to the derrick cross brace, and removing his hat with a flourish, shouted:

"Ladies and gentlemen: Mr. Wilson announces that all is ready for his daring flight into the clouds. I must ask that each and every one of you maintain complete silence. Any undue noise may divert the attention of the operator and the slightest disturbance may mean his instant death."

The mob seemed to sink back in awe. Bud and President Elder were perhaps the only persons present whose hearts were not, figuratively, in their mouths. The bareheaded president raised his hand. You might have heard a pin drop.

"When you are ready, Mr. Wilson, say 'Go.' "

Throwing on the ignition and giving the balance wheel a turn, Bud saw the white propellers begin to revolve. As they gathered speed and the engine was fully in motion—the car begin-

ning to tremble under the impact—Bud sprang into the little seat, thrust his feet into the hanging supports and grasped the levers.

As his lips framed themselves to give the final signal, a flying figure shot into his sight. A man panting, and with his hat in his hand was rushing across the cleared space closely pursued by one of the special policemen. Hardly able to speak, his arm wildly gesticulating, the new arrival was shouting:

“Stop, stop. I just got here. What are you doin’?”

“Get out o’ the way,” shouted Bud in reply. “Get off that track.”

“I ’m Dare,” panted the man. “Who ’s tryin’ to run this? Stop!”

“Get off that track,” shouted Bud again.

“You ’ll break your neck,” the breathless man managed to get out. But he saw the car trembling for the start, and he began moving aside.

“Where ’s Mr. Elder?” he cried. “Wait a minute. I ’ll make the flight. Hold on!”

“Go,” rang out from the boy in the aeroplane.

It came like a pistol shot, clear and distinct. But President Elder at the weight rope hesitated.

“Go,” came once more.

There was a note of command in the one word

that startled the official. Whatever his judgment was at the moment, President Elder mechanically jerked the cord. With a crashing creak of the derrick and a thud of falling sand bags, the starting rope whipped over the pulleys; there was a spray of melted tallow thrown fifty feet into the air by the flying skids; five thousand spectators gasped and fell back as if panic stricken, and the aeroplane smoked forward as if rushing into a vacuum.

Half way along the track, the rocking aeroplane seemed to lose headway for an instant. The pressure of the air in front and the force of the propellers behind had equalled and overcome the force of gravity. As the starting rope hook fell from the frame, the two great planes, like a kite in the wind, darted into a giant leap ahead.

Hundreds of spectators, still lingering in the path of the airship, threw themselves onto the ground just in time. The aeroplane almost touched the earth as the leap seemed to slacken, but this Bud had been anticipating. He did not know whether the first dart of the car would be up or down, to the right or left. But he did know that there was not one chance in a thousand that the flight would be straight ahead and up-

ward. What professional aviators had learned by long experience, Bud knew he had to get by sheer cool headed pluck.

He had thought over this idea so constantly that his muscles were set and ready like springs. Not even the narrow escape of the people in front of him rattled the boy. His body was cold from a realization of the great risk he was taking, but this did not disconcert him. When Bud shouted the word that was to hurl him into the air, he dismissed every thought from his mind but this: "up, down, right, left."

It was all done in a second, but Bud's thinking apparatus responded. "Down," his whole being cried out, and his muscles responded like a spring. Almost before the boy could realize what he was doing, he had thrown the front, horizontal rudder up. In another instant he knew he was going to fly; the ground dropped beneath him, and then a tremendous roar sounded in his ears. He gasped. But the sound was only the wild cheers of the multitude beneath. He *was* flying—the aeroplane was soaring swiftly upward. It was like falling in a dream. With nervous dread, the boy looked about. Then came his third shock—the fair-grounds were already behind him. He had passed beyond the terri-

tory in which he was to operate. He was at least three hundred feet in the air.

Suddenly all fear, apprehension and nervousness left Bud.

"It 's all over now," he said to himself. "These things don't fall like rocks. If the engine stops, I 'll come down like a parachute. Here goes to do my stunt."

A minute later, Bud was directing the aeroplane along the back stretch of the race track about one hundred and fifty feet above the ground. It all seemed so easy that he wondered why he had had any apprehension. In the midst of a chorus of yells and hurrahs from the hundreds who were vainly trying to keep pace with the aeroplane, Bud at last heard one positive voice:

"Get nearer the ground, you fool."

The boy could not distinguish the man calling, but he recognized the voice. It was that of the stranger—the expert, T. Glenn Dare. So far, Bud had not time to think over the sudden appearance of the long waited for man. But he smiled as the episode came back to him.

"That must have been the Gypsy Queen's ring," he thought to himself. "Any way, I got my chance. I 'm satisfied."

Then he wondered: "What will Mr. Dare do when he makes a flight to-morrow. I wonder if he 'll stay close to the ground. He 's only jealous," concluded Bud.

Prompted by that foolish idea and more than eager to take full advantage of his opportunity, the gritty boy decided that he was not satisfied—he determined, on a wild impulse, to test the airship to its limit.

Circling the half-mile track, he dropped down nearer the ground as he passed the crowded grand stand, but he was too intent on his work to give any heed to the applause that greeted him. The dusty track was packed with spectators throwing their hats into the air and shouting: "Let her out," "Gimme a ride," "Good boy, Bud," and such expressions rang in his ears, but they did not draw even a smile.

Again, the wonderful craft, true to her steering gear and responding to her propellers in the almost dead calm, circled the track. But this time, as Bud reached the lower turn, he veered off to the left. As the inclined planes moved forward toward the center of the track, Bud put his indiscreet resolution into effect.

By the time he reached the far end of the track he was five hundred feet in the air. Then, in-

stead of turning, he held his course beyond the enclosure out over the adjoining fields and pastures. Here, with a long sweep in the air, he turned and headed over the grounds once more. By the time he had passed the grand-stand again, he was at least a thousand feet in the air.

At that moment, the boy began to regret his foolhardiness. To turn at that height, with the sinking swing that always followed such an operation, was enough to try the nerve of the most experienced. And, to make matters worse, Bud perversely held to his ascending flight. When the limits of the grounds had been again passed, the novice was, it was afterwards estimated, fourteen hundred feet in the air.

“Now,” muttered Bud, “it ’s sink or swim.”

Closing his eyes, with one hand he threw the vertical lever slowly over for the turn, and at the same moment, he threw up the plane tips with the warping lever. It was almost sickening, the long swoop that followed, but, as Bud felt the warped surface checking the dip, he breathed again. Then he opened his eyes. The airship shed fell on his vision dead ahead and not far below.

Gritting his teeth to keep up his courage, the youngster made ready to complete his program.

As the aeroplane steadied, Bud pushed the horizontal planes downward, and as the bird-like craft began to descend, he turned and shut off the engine.

“They say any one can fly,” said Bud to himself, “but that it takes judgment to make a landing. I ’ll either make or break right here.”

As the swiftly whirling blades of the propellers stopped, the aeroplane’s flight slackened. Then the ivory-winged truss began to settle like a softly falling leaf. A mass of black heads appeared beneath. Suddenly, they separated, and Bud saw the ground rising as if to meet him. It was the crucial moment. The horizontal rudders sprang up, the airship seemed to pause, then with a feeble response to her steering gear, it rose a few feet and drifted along over the trodden grass. Then the landing skids touched the ground—there was a slight rebound, and Bud’s flight was at an end.

CHAPTER VIII

AMATEUR VS. PROFESSIONAL.

Every one in the yelling, pushing crowd seemed to be trying to get hold of the aeroplane. But again the policemen forced the spectators back and Bud saw, even before he alighted, and a good deal to his disgust, that Mr. Dare seemed to be in charge of the situation. As the young aviator climbed from the frame, the professional and President Elder confronted him:

"Young man," said the former, in a very superior tone, "you 're in luck to be alive. Have n't you any sense?"

Bud looked him over. The man was about thirty-five years old, rather nattily dressed in grey clothes, a blue scarf and a chauffeur's cap. Two or three sharp replies occurred to Bud, but he suppressed them, and turned to Mr. Elder. The latter walked into the tent, and motioned to Bud to follow. Then the boy suddenly realized that the fair president was trembling with anger.

"Bud," he began at once, trying to be calm, "did n't I tell you what to do? Did n't I give you your program? Was n't you to fly three times around the track and then come down?"

"And you don't like it because I varied it a little? Because I gave 'em a good run for their money?"

Mr. Elder shook his finger before the boy's face.

"Mr. Dare tells me it was one chance in a thousand that you did n't smash the machine."

"Did n't worry about my breaking my neck at the same time, did he?" asked Bud with a smile.

"We risked two thousand dollars' worth of property in your possession, and you took every chance you could with it—"

"Including the risk of my own life," retorted Bud. "Look here, Mr. Elder, I would n't get excited over what T. Glenn Dare thinks. He has good reason to find fault with me."

The fair official made a new gesture of impatience.

"That 's neither here nor there. Going up that way was a crazy thing to do, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

Bud looked at the ground a moment. Then he said:

"That 's my usual luck, Mr. Elder. I don't make any excuses. I see I 'm in the wrong, and I 'll take the short cut out. I have n't hurt your airship, and there she is. Mr. T. Glenn Dare is

here ready to take charge of it. I thank you for the chance you gave me."

Bud started away.

"Here, Bud! Come here!"

Bud paused, but he did not return. "I guess we don't need you any more, but there ain't no call to go 'way mad."

"You said I ought to be ashamed of myself. I 'm going where I can feel ashamed without attracting attention."

Bud smiled, and Mr. Elder looked a little embarrassed.

"I reckon if your fifty-dollar-a-day man had gone up there and done what I did, you 'd all be pattin' him on the back. Like as not there 'd be a piece in the paper about it."

Mr. Elder was even more embarrassed.

"When he goes up to-morrow," went on Bud, "I reckon you 'd better insist that he skim around over the ground. I tell you what I think, Mr. Elder," said Bud, suddenly growing more serious, "a big bluff goes a long ways. You would n't dare to criticise your professional aviator. Why? Because he 's an expert. And yet there isn't one of you knows whether he knows more about aeroplanes than I do. He 'll

get the glad hand. I get a good swift kick. Good bye."

Mr. Elder was at Bud's side before he could leave the shed.

"You certainly are a touchy boy," he said in a not unkind voice. "I don't see why I should apologize to you," he added, "but I 'd like to do one thing—here 's ten dollars for helping us out."

Bud looked up with a peculiar expression. Never before in his life had he earned so much money in practically one day. For a moment, he worked his foot back and forth in the dust. Then he said:

"That just proves what I said. It 's the bluff that gets the money and the praise. I told you I 'd do what I could for nothing. I 'm satisfied if you are. But, if I took any pay, why should n't I have as much as your professional?"

Mr. Elder grew red in the face.

"He is to get fifty dollars a day. What can he do that I have n't done? I 'm much obliged to you, Mr. Elder, and I don't want you to put me down as a smart aleck. I either work for nothing or I 'm worth as much as the fellow who is no better."

The disturbed official became restless.

"You mean you want fifty dollars?" he exclaimed, almost in consternation.

"I should say not," retorted Bud, "but," and he laughed outright, "if you offer me anything, don't make it a cent less."

Before the perplexed official could say anything, Bud was gone. The crowd was in a thick ring around the aeroplane, and the boy had no trouble in making his way almost unobserved out of the race-track field. With ten cents in his pocket and tired and sleepy, he hurried toward the entrance. No one seemed to recognize in him the "hero of the aeroplane," the skilled and daring aviator who had just made a record breaking flight of 1400 feet in the air.

Money came too hard with Bud to permit him to spend his ten cents for a ride to town in a hack. For that reason, although it was not yet much after four o'clock, he set out on foot to cover the two-mile walk to his home—or Attorney Cyrus Stockwell's house. This was not a pretentious building, but, being on the edge of town, it had considerable ground around it, and the old two-story frame structure had been Bud's home for nearly ten years.

Bud's father had at one time owned a small foundry in Scottsville; but, his health failing, he

disposed of it, moved to the country, and tried farming on a small scale. Mrs. Wilson was a cousin of Mrs. Stockwell's, and when both Bud's parents died the same winter, the boy, at Mrs. Stockwell's suggestion, went to live with the Stockwells. There he had been ever since.

Reaching the house, Bud found it locked tight as wax. Undoubtedly the lawyer and his wife had gone to the fair. The key, usually hidden under the strip of rag carpet on the front porch, was not there. But this did not interfere much with Bud. In the rear was a summer kitchen with an adjoining grape arbor. On this arbor, Bud had more than once made nocturnal ascents and descents to and from the kitchen roof, and thus to the window of his own room.

Shinning up the arbor, he easily entered the house through the window of his room. It was dark and close within, but the returned wanderer was hungry and he hurried at once to the kitchen. Mrs. Stockwell did not mind Bud "piecing," but she was particular about the neatness of her kitchen. So, instead of leaving traces of his attack on the larder, Bud used no dishes. He found milk in the ice box. A dipperful of that was consumed, and the dipper washed and returned to its hook.

Then with a slice of cold boiled ham, the back, two wings and the neck of some fried chicken, six doughnuts, two pieces of bread covered with new grape jelly, and an apple, Bud went to his room. Long before his foster parents returned from the fair, Bud, his hunger satisfied, had undressed, washed himself and gone to bed.

About seven o'clock, Attorney Stockwell, who had been reading the local paper on the front porch, stuck his head into the kitchen and asked if supper would soon be ready.

"I kind o' been waitin' thinkin' maybe Bud 'd come home this evening," was Mrs. Stockwell's answer.

"You don't need to count on him, I reckon," answered her husband. "He probably won't think much about home long as that airship is on his mind."

"It 's funny to me," added Mrs. Stockwell, stirring the potatoes, "that he would n't take no pay. Goodness knows he could use it. The boy ain't got hardly a whole shirt to his back."

"He 'll have to be doin' something soon," said the attorney. "I can't keep him here for nothin' all his life. An' he 's nearly grown now."

His wife sighed:

"He 's been a purty good boy at that. An' he 's been quite a help to me. I dunno how I 'd get along without him."

"Well, you better not wait for him. He 's gettin' altogether too smart. If he 's too proud to take the money he earned, I ain't. President Elder gave it to me to hold for him, *in trust*, but I guess Bud owes me a good deal more 'n that."

The Stockwells ate their supper without Bud, although there was enough talk about him. That evening the lawyer made inquiries in the boy's usual haunts, but no one had seen him since the aeroplane landed. So the evening passed until nine o'clock, at which hour Attorney Stockwell was summoned by telephone to come at once to Mr. Elder's private office in the First National Bank. Here he found a hastily called conference of fair directors. The president was there with Judge Pennington and Mr. Waldron, a country member.

"Here it is in a nutshell," explained President Elder. "We either call this fellow's bluff, or let him 'play horse' with us. What 'll it be?"

The situation was this: Mr. T. Glenn Dare, the aeroplane expert, gave as a reason for his failure to appear that he had not expected to

reach Scottsville until noon of the previous day. The work of setting up the airship, he explained, would have required but a few hours. The reason for his non-arrival at noon of the day before was because he had gone to Scottsville, Kentucky, a small and out-of-the-way place requiring a drive across country, and having no telephone or telegraph. Returning to Cincinnati, he had "wired" the fair officials, after telegraphing east to his employers for instructions, and had then hastened to Scottsville, making the last stage of his journey by trolley car.

This explanation was not satisfactory to Mr. Elder. Mr. Dare confessed he had not seen any letters to his firm from the fair officials, and had started west with only a memorandum of his destination. He would not concede that his firm had made a mistake, and boldly asserted that the mix up was probably due to carelessness on the part of the fair committee.

"All right," Mr. Elder had said. "You say you were in Cincinnati early to-day. Why didn't you send us word you'd be here? No telegram reached any of us."

"How do I know that?" impudently asked Mr. Dare. "Looks to me as if you people were trying to beat me out of a job."

“And it looks to me, to speak right out,” replied Mr. Elder in considerable heat, “as if you might have been drunk for two or three days.”

Instead of indignantly resenting this suggestion, Mr. Dare only got red in the face and offered to produce innumerable affidavits that he had been wandering around the country since Monday morning looking for Scottsville and that he never indulged in intoxicating beverages.

This interview between Mr. Elder and Expert Dare had taken place on the fair-grounds just after Bud disappeared and the car had been housed for the night. It left anything but cordial relations between the two men. But the explosion came later. As Mr. Elder was instructing the watchmen concerning the care of the airship during the night, Mr. Dare approached.

“In order that we have no further misunderstanding, I ’d like to have a check for one hundred and fifty dollars—the three days I ’ve already lost.”

The president, put out over his encounter with Bud, and disgruntled over the conduct of the expert, whirled like a wild man.

“A check for one hundred and fifty dollars?”

“You don’t suppose I ’m coming all the way out here for fun, do you?” sneeringly answered Mr. Dare.

“Just put this in your pipe and smoke it,” snorted the fair president, shaking his finger in the expert’s face. “You ’ll get paid when you go to work—that ’s the contract. There was n’t a thing said about comin’ or goin’. For the three days left this week, we ’ll pay you just fifty dollars each day. Not a cent more.”

“That aeroplane won’t move a foot till I get my money. And since this controversy about it, you ’d better pay in advance—three hundred dollars. No money, no exhibition.”

“We got along without you so far.”

“Violating your contract, yes. Part of the agreement of sale was that I was to operate the car. We don’t turn out aeroplanes to every Tom, Dick and Harry. Under your contract, that car don’t go up unless I ’m in it, and I don’ go in it till I have my money. There ’s plenty of law to fix that. Do I get my money?”

“Not a cent,” snapped Mr. Elder. “Bud Wilson will go up in that machine to-morrow.”

CHAPTER IX

BUD MAKES A STRANGE CONTRACT.

President Elder told all this to the assembled directors. A storm broke at once. Naturally, Attorney Stockwell approved what the president had done. He did it for two reasons: he was anxious to get Bud a profitable job, and he saw at once that Judge Pennington was opposed to the action taken by Mr. Elder. In the lively discussion, the other director, Mr. Waldron, sided with Mr. Elder because Attorney Stockwell had once opposed him in a lawsuit.

Judge Pennington argued that Mr. T. Glenn Dare would undoubtedly sue the association.

“Let him,” exclaimed President Elder. “We can beat him. He did n’t report, and I ’m convinced he was on a spree somewhere. Look at the advantage. If we pay him what he demands, it will be six days at fifty dollars a day. That ’s three hundred dollars. We can save that.”

“This young Wilson won’t work for nothing, will he?” asked Mr. Waldron.

President Elder felt compelled at this point to relate his experience with Bud. He told of of-

fering to pay their amateur operator; how the boy had refused the money, and how Attorney Stockwell had finally accepted the sum to hold in trust.

Judge Pennington laughed outright.

"An' that 's what we 're up against, is it?" he asked, with a chuckling sneer. "Would n't take ten dollars an' wants fifty dollars? And yet you 're takin' the risk o' a lawsuit just to give him a job."

"But," insisted the president, "you forget. He 'll do in a pinch what he won't do for wages. He won't work for ten dollars a day, but he 'll work for nothing."

"Ef he 'll do that," promptly suggested Director Waldron, "I vote we give him the job."

"That ain't treatin' the boy right," chimed in Attorney Stockwell. "Be fair with him. He 'll listen to reason. It 's worth more 'n ten dollars to risk your life that way. If you 'll call it twenty-five dollars I 'll undertake to see that he does the work."

"My Lafe would do it for nothin' as a matter o' pride, if he was n't sick," urged Judge Pennington.

"But he is sick," broke in Mr. Elder. "We 've fired our expert, an' we 've got to get some one

or cut out the performance. I agree with Director Stockwell. If we call it twenty-five dollars—and that 'll only be for three more days— I 'm convinced Bud will help us out."

But Judge Pennington and Director Waldron were stubborn. The matter was argued for nearly an hour, and finally a compromise was reached. President Elder was authorized to pay to Bud not over twenty dollars a day to attempt another ascent. Then the meeting adjourned. At its conclusion, Attorney Stockwell hurried off home to find Bud and tell him of his good fortune.

Strangely enough, the lawyer had hardly disappeared when the other three directors met again on the bank steps.

"That 's all we could do afore Stockwell," said Judge Pennington at once. "Ef we 'd said any more, Attorney Stockwell would have put a bug in the boy's ear an' they 'd have worked together. What you want to do, Mr. Elder, is to get the boy alone. I ain't no love for him, but I will say he gave us a good show, and I reckon he can do it agin. Ef he won't work for twenty dollars, give him what 's necessary."

"I understand," replied President Elder, "Stockwell is a good deal on the make. If he

thought we 'd stand for any more, he 'd see that the boy holds out for the highest figure."

"Better give him fifty dollars," slowly conceded Director Waldron, "rather than put off the show. An' we 'll make money at that. But it 's ridic'lous for a boy o' his age."

"Get him at any figure in reason," urged Judge Pennington. "I want the fair to go off with a boom. An' if it 's up to the kid to make it go—all right. But it 'll swell him up awful."

Before Attorney Stockwell reached his home, Mrs. Stockwell had discovered Bud's presence, although she had not disturbed him. When her husband reached the house and learned that his adopted son was safe in bed, he was greatly relieved. He went at once to Bud's room. It was after eleven o'clock. Arousing the sleeping boy, he prepared to close the deal between Bud and the fair association.

Bud's first response was to pull the covers over his head and snore lustily.

"Wake up, Bud, I want to talk to you."

"I have been here all the time," sleepily responded the boy. "I ain't done nothin'. Is it morning?"

Attorney Stockwell shook him again until the lad was fully awake. Then he asked him, some-

what brusquely, what he meant "by riding such a high horse" with Mr. Elder and refusing to take the ten dollars.

"Because I said I 'd work for nothing," said Bud, crawling from under his sheet and sitting on the bedside.

"But they are willing to pay you, and pay you well. Men don't work for nothing. I work all day for ten dollars," added the lawyer.

"That 's it," said Bud. "I don't want to work all my life for ten dollars a day. I want nothing or what I 'm worth."

"Rubbish," snorted the lawyer. "You talk pretty swell for a boy who ain't never yet made enough to keep him."

"I reckon I owe you a good deal of money," exclaimed Bud, still blinking his sleepy eyes and then looking at his foster father sharply.

"We ain't talkin' about that," answered the lawyer evasively.

"I know *'we'* ain't," said Bud. "But *I* am. You never talk about it when I want to. Why did you take me in? Did my father leave me any property?"

"The courts 'll take care o' that at the right time," replied Attorney Stockwell pompously.

"All right," replied Bud, sleepily. "When

they do, you just take out all I 've cost you and quit throwin' it up to me ever' day."

The lawyer rose and walked about a moment in an embarrassed way.

"That 's all right, Bud. We won't quarrel about that. I ain't puttin' you out o' house an' home. I did n't wake you up to talk o' that. I got ten dollars here President Elder gave me to give to you."

"Keep it yourself," yawned Bud, "and I won't owe you so much."

"We 've fired that Mr. Dare," exclaimed the lawyer, playing his trump card, "and we held a meeting to-night to get another operator. We elected you."

"Me?" exclaimed Bud, at last fully awake. "Elected me?"

"Yes," went on the lawyer. "He got gay with us—wanted pay for six days, and we discharged him."

"And the fair people want me to sail the aeroplane again?" continued Bud jubilantly.

"That 's what was voted."

Bud sat up on the edge of the bed, his eyes snapping and his face wreathed in smiles.

"I guess Mr. Elder must have changed his

mind," Bud commented. "He told me I 'ought to be ashamed of myself.' "

"He has. We 're all agreed. And we 've agreed, too, that you 're to have twenty-five dollars a day for your work."

The boy straightened up as if he had been struck. From smiles, his face became set, and finally rebellious. He picked at the bed clothes a moment, and then said:

"I 'm sorry they did that. I 'd have done it for nothing to help out. But when it comes to a price, I 'm worth just as much as Mr. Dare. If they want to pay me, it 's fifty dollars a day."

"You won't do for twenty-five dollars a day what you 'll do for nothing?"

"That 's it. I said I would n't. That 's all there is to it."

"You refuse," said the lawyer, growing red in the face.

"You 've said it."

Attorney Stockwell fumbled at his collar as if he were choking. Then he sputtered:

"You can think this over till morning. If you don't get some sense into your head by that time, you 'd better find some other place to live."

"Meaning I 'm kicked out," replied Bud instantly and springing to his feet.

"You can sleep over it," added the lawyer. "Don't need to act hastily. But it 's no use us trying to get along together if you 're too proud to help out when I get you a good job."

"I don't need to sleep over it," answered Bud promptly. "My sleepin' is done for to-night. If that 's the verdict, we 'll call it quits."

The lawyer was palpably embarrassed. He was afraid to put Bud out for reasons best known to himself, but he felt like it.

"I 'll see you later," he snapped suddenly, and left the room.

Bud's sleeping was n't as nearly finished as he thought. With youthful agility, he turned in again, and did not awaken until daylight. The Stockwells breakfasted early, but Bud's chores were done when his foster father appeared. Somewhat to Bud's surprise, the affair of the night before was not recalled, and the boy was about to escape from the breakfast table when he was surprised to see President Elder's well known rig dash up to the house.

"You won't listen to me," explained the lawyer, in no very good humor, "so Mr. Elder has come to reason with you."

"I 'll do it for fifty dollars or nothing," stoutly insisted Bud.

When Mr. Elder appeared on the porch—and it was apparent that he was not overflowing with good humor—he wasted very little time. After greeting the lawyer and his wife, he said:

“Bud, we worked together pretty well yesterday. Come with me. I want to see you.”

“Go along,” exclaimed Attorney Stockwell, in a tone of authority. But this was not needed. Bud needed no urging. With a smile, he led the way to the buggy.

The fair official started toward the center of the town. Before he could open negotiations, Bud exclaimed:

“Mr. Elder, I reckon I know what you want. You ’ve fallen out with the guy that threw us down and you want me to do the aeroplane stunt again.”

President Elder smiled.

“You know what I said yesterday,” went on Bud. “I don’t like to break my word. But don’t you think you people are makin’ me purty cheap?”

“Perhaps not as cheap as you think!”

“Mr. Stockwell told me I ’m to get twenty-five dollars.”

“And you think that ain’t enough?”

"Fifty dollars," said Bud with a smile, "or nothing."

The thrifty official grasped at this straw.

"Are you willing to do it for nothing?"

"Yes. But I 'll do it as a favor, and I want a favor in return."

"What 's that?" asked Mr. Elder suspiciously.

"Well," went on Bud, with some embarrassment, "you 're a big man in this town, Mr. Elder. You can get about anything you want. I reckon Judge Pennington would do you a favor if you asked."

"Are you in trouble with Judge Pennington?"

"I 'm not. But two of my friends are. See that, Mr. Elder," continued Bud, showing the ring Madame Zecatacas had given him. His companion gazed at it intently.

"That 's a charm," explained Bud. "It was given to me by an old gypsy who had n't any other way to show me she was my friend. It 's a good luck piece. I don't know as it helped me any, but the old woman who gave it to me wanted it to."

"I don't see," began Mr. Elder.

"This old woman and her son-in-law made Lefe Pennington mad. It was n't their fault. It

was his. Yesterday, Judge Pennington had 'em arrested for assaultin' Lafe, which they had n't. They yanked 'em off 'n the fair-grounds and locked 'em up. They 're goin' to have a trial to-day. They ain't done nothin', but they are my friends, in a kind of a way. If you 'll persuade Judge Pennington to let 'em go, I 'll work the airship all week for nothin'."

President Elder laughed. Then he slapped the boy on the back.

"Bud," he said laughing heartily, "you are certainly a strange boy. That 's a go. I 'll promise."

"Let 'em out right away," continued Bud, "so they can get in a full day tellin' fortunes."

"Right away," laughed the fair president.

"Then I guess I 'll take the first hack out to the grounds and get busy."

"I suppose you won't mind my paying your expenses," suggested the president, when they reached the square.

"Got to have hack fare and dinner money," said Bud, with a smile. And accepting a five dollar bill, Bud was off to the fair-grounds and airship shed again.

CHAPTER X

THE FLIGHT IN THE DARK.

At twelve o'clock that day, while Bud was busy on the aeroplane, Mr. T. Glenn Dare and Attorney Cyrus Stockwell suddenly appeared before the airship shed. Mr. Dare walked in briskly, took off his coat, and gave every sign of taking charge of the apparatus. Bud shook his head.

"Strangers not allowed in here, sir."

The expert laughed.

"Since I 've a contract that calls for my being here, I was about to say the same thing to you, young man."

"I guess we understand ourselves," replied Bud, with composure. "President Elder has been in here several times this morning. He left orders for me to keep all strangers out."

"Perhaps you 're goin' to put me out," smiled Mr. Dare.

"I would if I had time," answered Bud. "But I 'm busy. Any way, that ain't the program. I 'm just to tell you to get out."

Mr. Dare laughed outright.

"Put me out," he said banteringly.

"Jim," called out Bud, good naturedly, and resuming his work on the engine, "accommodate the gentleman. He wants to be put out."

Jim Hoarr, the night watchman, who was curled up in a corner of the shed, slowly arose and hitched up his trousers. Jim was not tall, but his tight undershirt exposed such a mass of rounded muscle and chest that Mr. Dare at once stepped back.

"Wot gent?" asked Jim sleepily, glancing first at Mr. Dare and then at Attorney Stockwell.

"Bud," exclaimed Attorney Stockwell angrily, "come here."

"I 'm busy," said Bud, polishing the engine industriously.

The lawyer stepped over to Bud and caught him by the shoulder. The next moment, Attorney Stockwell was sliding over the worn and dusty grass outside the shed and Jim was hurrying back for another victim. But his services were not needed. Mr. T. Glenn Dare had caught up his coat and escaped beneath the canvas on the far side of the tent.

With difficulty Bud refrained from laughing. But he ran out after his foster father.

"I want to apologize for that," he began.

“Jim did n’t understand.”

Attorney Stockwell was boiling with rage.

“I thought you told me you would n’t do this again,” he almost shouted, “for less than fifty dollars a day.”

“Or nothing,” added Bud.

The lawyer’s face grew white.

“You ungrateful whelp,” he almost hissed.

“Don’t you set your foot in my house again.”

“Good-bye,” said Bud indifferently, turning away.

Attorney Stockwell was too full of rage to talk. As Mr. Dare joined him, they turned and hastened away.

“That ’s all we wanted,” said the lawyer at last when he found his tongue. “Now you ’ve got to come back when it ’s time to make the flight and offer to take charge. Have a witness with you, and if they refuse to accept your services, you have a plain case. I ’ll arrange with Judge Clark to issue a writ this afternoon. As for this watchman, we ’ll have him locked up before night and discharged to boot.”

“How about the kid?” asked the expert.

Attorney Stockwell shook his head ominously.

“I ’ll attend to him all right. Never fear as to that.”

Which meant that he was already sorry that he had ordered Bud away from his house.

Attorney Stockwell represented a type of lawyers found in all small towns. Without reputation for pronounced legal ability, he undertook all cases that came his way and what he had told Bud was true; often enough he gave his services for ten dollars a day when he could get no more. Therefore, when T. Glenn Dare had called on him that morning and offered him fifty dollars to protect his interests in the aeroplane dispute, the lawyer forgot local pride—even overlooked the fact that he might be called on to take action against his fellow fair directors.

If he had any compunctions on this score, they disappeared when he learned that President Elder had induced his foster son to accept service once more without recompense.

"Your redress is very clear," Attorney Stockwell told Mr. Dare when the latter explained all the facts in the case. "The contract of sale calls for one thousand eight hundred dollars for the aeroplane, but it also stipulates that you are to be employed for six days at fifty dollars a day. The cost of the machine, is, therefore, two thousand one hundred dollars. So far, I understand, nothing has been paid on the machine."

“Not a cent,” explained the representative of the manufacturers. “The First National Bank guaranteed the payment on the aeroplane proving satisfactory. I’ve had no chance to demonstrate this.”

“That ’s all that is necessary,” sagely commented the lawyer. “If the directors do not give you that chance this afternoon, we will go before the county court, secure a writ of replevin, turn it over to the sheriff, and to-night, a deputy sheriff will levy on the machine. If the directors do not then comply with their contract, you will have a right to remove the aeroplane.”

At two-thirty in the afternoon, Mr. Dare reappeared at the fair-grounds, but he kept aloof from the airship shed until he saw President Elder appear. To the latter, he formally made application to be permitted to make the flight.

“You ’re four days too late, young man. You did n’t keep your contract. and we won’t keep ours.”

“Then you refuse?” asked Mr. Dare, turning to the ’bus driver, Doug’ Jackson, who was with the aviator and on a pass which he had at last secured.

“Is Doug’ your witness?” asked Mr. Elder, smiling.

Doug' threw out his chest.

"Mr. Stockwell told me to come along," he explained. "He give me a pass."

While this conversation was in progress, Jim Hoarr, the muscular night watchman, had caught sight of Mr. Dare. Still eager to be of service, he had approached the group. Seeing him, President Elder laughed.

"Jim," he said, "Doug' has a pass that 'll take him out o' the grounds, but I think Mr. Dare might like help."

Before even Jim could get busy, the alarmed aviator had disappeared in the fast gathering crowd.

A little after three o'clock, Bud made his second flight. The news of the previous day's exploit had spread not only through the town but even into the near-by country, and the crowd was immense. The flight was not as spectacular as that of the day before, but it was longer and not less successful. Four times the perfectly working car circled the half-mile track. The time, taken with great ceremony by the trotting and running horse judges assembled in their stand, was officially announced as four minutes. This, considering the turns, was remarkably fast. Bud offered at the end of the flight to make an-

other short flight with a passenger but this was vetoed.

Hardly had Bud alighted when two eager figures pushed their way forward. They were Madame Zecatacas and her son-in-law.

"Look here, Kid," began the latter at once and extending an awkward hand, "me an' the ole lady has come to tell you we 're much obliged to you."

"For what?" asked Bud, pretending ignorance.

"Never you mind about that," continued the man gruffly.

"We 're on all right. They did n't make no bones about it. You squared it all right. How 'bout it, ole lady?"

The Gypsy Queen reached out her brown hands, took Bud's hand in one of hers and tapped the ring, which he still wore, with the other.

"The Gypsy Queen sees good fortune for the young gentleman. Wear old Zecatacas' ring—it will bring good luck. She can give no more."

Bud was sure he saw tears in the old woman's eyes; but, pressing his hand in hers, she said no more.

"It 's all right, Kid," went on the man, "that

means a lot. I 'd rather have it than money. We ain't got nothin'—we 're poor people, but when Jack Stanley kin do ye a turn it 'll be done. That 's all."

How well Jack Stanley and Madame Zecatacas kept their word, Bud soon found out.

The aeroplane trial at an end, every one seemed to forget Bud. Homeless at last, he did not care much. So long as his engagement with the fair officials lasted, he determined to stay in the aeroplane shed, which he now began to call the "aerodrome." His only regret was that he had had no opportunity to say good-bye to Mrs. Stockwell. But he would send her a letter. Meanwhile, with Mr. Elder's five dollars in his pocket to provide for his meals, he whistled at hard luck and counted himself content.

Yet, as evening came on, the thought of Mrs. Stockwell bothered him. So long as he belonged in her home, a failure to return at night did not bother him a great deal. Now that he was not going back again, he had a longing to tell her "good-bye." Besides there were a few clothes, his parents' pictures, some airship drawings and a couple of books that he felt he would like to have before Attorney Stockwell might take a notion to destroy them.

One of these books Bud was determined not to lose. This was a new story—"In the Clouds for Uncle Sam or Morey Marshall of the Signal Corps." Anything relating to aeroplanes interested Bud, and this book was wholly about the new flying machines, but, in Morey Marshall's adventures, he had just reached the most exciting part.

"Whatever happens," said Bud to himself, "I 've got to find out what came of the blue packet Morey found in his father's old desk and what happened to Morey and Amos when they ran away from home."

But it was some days before Bud had a chance to renew his reading of this tale.

In the early evening, he knew that the lawyer always spent a few hours "up town."

Allowing a reasonable time after the usual supper hour, Bud stealthily approached the Stockwell residence from the rear, and entered the yard through the garden gate. There was a light in the kitchen, but Mrs. Stockwell was not there. Tiptoeing around the house, he heard voices on the porch. One was that of a stranger. But he easily made out that of the lawyer, too, and he stepped back. Mrs. Stockwell was not in sight.

"I 'll at least get my things," he said to himself.

Making his way to the grape arbor, he shinned up to the summer kitchen roof, and, in bare feet, entered his room. Without venturing to strike a light, he felt around, got the articles he had come for, and then, stooping in a corner, by the light of a few matches, he wrote a note on the fly leaf of one of his few books.

"Dear Mother Stockwell," it ran, "your husband' has drove me away, and I got to go, but I 'll be back to see you some time you have been good to me and I 'll be good to you when I can so no more at presence from

Bud."

Opening the book on the table, he softly escaped over the roof. He was about to drop onto the grape arbor, when voices sounded immediately beneath him.

"Now, don't wait for me, Mother," said one of them—easily distinguished as that of the lawyer himself. "I 'll be out late on business."

" 'Tain't about Bud, is it?" asked the other—Mrs. Stockwell.

"No," sharply replied her husband. "But he caused it. It 's legal business. You can't understand it."

“I wonder why the child don’t come home?” said Mrs. Stockwell.

“Oh, he ’ll be home all right. I ’m going to send for him. I knew you would worry about him again, so I told ’em to tell him you wanted to see him.”

“Cyrus,” added his wife, “I don’t think you ’re treatin’ Bud right. He ’s a good boy if he has half a chance.”

“Well,” retorted the lawyer, “you can treat him well to-night by keepin’ him in after he gets here. I ’m goin’ out to the fair-ground to-night with a deputy sheriff and levy on the aeroplane that ’s turned his head. We got a writ of replevin this afternoon and a deputy sheriff is goin’ to take the machine for Mr. Dare, who’s out on the front porch. If Bud gets in the way or interferes, he ’ll be locked up for his pains.”

“Lands sakes, Cyrus, Bud ain’t done no crime, has he?”

“No, but he ’s made a fool of himself. And he ’s tryin’ to make one o’ me. I ’m goin’ up town now for a while, and I reckon I ’ll be home ’bout midnight. You keep Bud here when he comes.”

“I ’ll lock him in his room,” exclaimed Mrs. Stockwell nervously.

As the two passed into the kitchen, Bud slipped down onto the arbor, recovered his shoes, glanced into the empty kitchen, reached into the window and captured a generous slice of jelly cake from a near-by table, and was off down the garden path.

By half past eight, he was again on the fairgrounds. He had had a half hour's walk in which to think over the thing he had heard. Out of all the projects that flashed into his busy brain, one only remained. It was a daring idea, but the more he thought it over, the more determined he was to execute it. Before going to the "aerodrome," he went to the tent of the Gypsy Queen. When he left it, Jack Stanley was with him.

Bud and Madame Zecatacas' son-in-law made a quick tour among some of Stanley's friends, all of whom, after a brief talk, seemed highly amused. And when Bud at last made his way across the dark enclosure within the race-track, Jack and four of his husky friends were gathered in a knot in the shadow of the judges' stand.

Approaching the aeroplane shed, Bud broke into a run and arrived, apparently, out of breath.

"Jim," he panted, "there 's trouble. Go right over to the ticket office and get Mr. Elder on the

telephone. When you get him read him this message. Got to get busy."

Finding a piece of paper, Bud laboriously wrote a few lines. Then, taking the vigilant watchman out into the dark where he could not see the message until he reached the office nearly a half mile away, Bud folded the scrap of paper, shoved it into the waiting watchman's hand and pushed him forward.

"You 'll watch things while I 'm gone?" called the hurrying messenger over his shoulder.

"You bet I will, Jim. I 'll not leave her. You can trust me."

As the flying watchman passed the judges' stand, Jack Stanley and his pals slipped around the little structure to keep out of his sight, and then the highly amused group rushed toward the airship shed.

The perspiring Jim had some trouble in getting President Elder on the wire, but when he did so, he read the fair official this note:

"Mr. Eldur

They have got up a skeme to take the air plane, and I can beet em by takin it away where they aint no one knows where it is. Dont worry about us, for I ll be on hand promp tomorrow

*at reglar time for the show. Dont have no fear
of nuthin for I m all O. K.*

Bud Wilson."

When, in response to President Elder's forceful injunction, Jim, the watchman, reached the airship shed again, the canvas front was up, the shed was empty, and only a smell of gasoline told of the stolen aeroplane.

CHAPTER XI

DUMPED INTO THE MARSH.

Plunging through the dark in an aeroplane, two hundred feet or more above the earth and in a moonless night, was Bud's predicament. Up to that time, at least, neither the Wright Brothers, Mr. Farman, Mr. Latham, nor Mr. Curtiss had had such an experience. When the chill night breeze struck the boy's face and he found himself sailing into what was like a black cave, for a moment he was panic stricken.

Of course, he had not taken such a hazardous chance without a plan. In a vague way, he had outlined what he hoped to do. But it was easier to lay that plan out in his mind while on the firm ground than it was to put it into execution high up in the impenetrable and chill air.

The thing that almost rattled Bud was the fact that he could not see the ground. He could not even make out the lines of the fences beneath him. It was like smoking a cigar in the dark when you can only tell that it is going by the fire on the end. The lack of vibration in an aeroplane is most pronounced in the dark. Like a

soaring bird, the ship glides forward with hardly a whirr or rattle to mark its flight. But the breeze on Bud's face and the spinning propellers told him he was advancing, and with the speed of a train.

"I got to strike the Little Town pike first thing," said Bud to himself at last, as he began to get his wits together. "If I can't do that, I'm up a stump. That's my only guide to where I got to go."

The scattered lights of the edge of Scottsville were just rushing beneath the aeroplane.

"I'll follow the edge of town to the north," went on Bud, talking almost aloud to himself. "When I come to the river and the bridge, I'll head north and get down low enough to see the road. That'll be my guide."

Five miles to the north of Scottsville, lay Little Town—three saloons, a postoffice, a store and an elevator. Northwest from Little Town, a road reached into the "hills." In any other part of the country these hills would have been hardly noticeable. But in Scott County, Indiana, they were comparatively mountains. Bud knew them as the scenes of many picnics and excursions.

At Camp's Mill, about three miles from Little

Town on the "hill road," where a creek, a mill race and a headgate afforded small water-power for a flour and saw mill, a dirt road turned sharply off to the north. Within a mile and in a thickly wooded region, the "hills" suddenly opened to enclose a pond. Little Town people called it Camp's Lake. Visitors from larger places usually described it as a "frog pond."

In the spring and summer, the shores of this little body of water—scarce a quarter of a mile long—were swamps full of cattails and spearmint. As Bud figured it, the damp, flat vegetation would now be dead and dry. To this secluded and seldom visited point, the youngster had decided to attempt to carry the stolen aeroplane. This was not wholly because the place was far from Scottsville. Bud had figured on all the problems he would have to face. That of making an ascent the next day bothered him a good deal more than the concealment of the airship. Here, he thought, he might be able to put into execution the only device he could figure out for starting the car on its flight again.

A sudden rumble beneath the car struck on Bud's ears.

"That 's the bridge," he said to himself. "It 's a team crossing the bridge."

He could not mistake that sound; nor would any other Scottsville boy. Bridges may look a good deal alike, but no two of them sound alike. The hollow noise of a wagon on a bridge always strikes the same note. That note Bud had known for ten years. And, though the structure was out of sight, the boy brought the aeroplane as sharply about as if it had been day. It was now a straightaway course of five miles to Little Town due north.

When the town lights were a half mile or so behind him, the determined lad inclined his horizontal rudders until the ship sank close enough to the ground to reveal forms. A little lower, the dusty, white turnpike unwound beneath him, and then he steadied the craft. Not until then did he begin to feel somewhat composed.

So far, the only thing that had bothered him was the fear that he might not be able to get away with the aeroplane successfully. Now he had time to think of something just as important.

"I wonder what they 'll think?" Bud finally asked himself. Then he recalled how President Elder had reprimanded him for taking chances with the car.

"Whew," whistled the lad, as the thought came back to him, "like as not, he 'll be sore all

over now. And what if I do land her all right and get her going again to-morrow? I can't come down at the fair-ground or the sheriff 'll nab me. I might as well have stayed. If I go back and give the show and sail away again without landin'—and that 's the only thing to do—where 'll I go? They can watch me and follow me. I can get more gasoline somewhere, but I can't hide out another night with the sheriff and Mr. Stockwell and Mr. Dare on my track."

With this new trouble bothering him, he held his course toward Little Town. Once, like a great, black, groaning bird, he shot over a buggy. The horse shied, and there were several alarmed imprecations from the occupants.

"Lucky they did n't shoot," thought Bud. "But I can't fly higher and know where I am."

Bud's selection of Camp's Lake as a desirable spot for his purpose showed how familiar he was with the country in all directions about Scottsville. His familiarity with this particular place was due to the fact that his father's farm had been just south of Little Town. Camp's Mill and its old-fashioned water wheel had always been Bud's joy. And Josh Camp was still one of his

boy chums. Or he would have been had Bud remained near Little Town.

He and Josh had, in earlier years, a firm belief that fish existed in Camp's Lake. They had never been able to absolutely prove this, but many a night's work with a lantern had proven that, if the pond were devoid of fish, it was infested with bull frogs of giant girth. The final argument in bringing the flying boy to his old stamping grounds was this.

Camp's Lake, whether lake or pond, was never devoid of water. Even beyond its margins, the swampy cattail beds oozed moisture. At the head of the body of water was a spring which flowed ceaselessly. At the foot of the lake, at one time, the surplus water drained away through the lower marsh ground to the creek feeding the mill-pond, a mile away at Camp's Mill.

As the country cleared up and the supply of water in the creek became less certain, Josh's father—who owned the land about Camp Lake—determined to utilize the supply going to waste there. Accounts of water storage in western irrigation districts had inspired this. The last time Bud saw the place, he found that Mr. Camp had dammed up the spillway at the end of the lake. In the center of the dam, he had built a

head-gate; and, from this, leading over the marsh, he had constructed a flume about four feet wide leading to the creek below.

"The place behind the hills is a good place to hide," thought Bud, reviewing the situation, "the flat shores of the pond are the best place to land without breaking anything, and the old flume is the best starting apparatus I can think of."

He knew there was an old flat-bottom boat and a skiff on Camp's Lake. On these, with Josh's help, if he could get it, and any other assistance that he could procure, he meant to carry the aeroplane to the dam. It was a part of his plan to place the flat boat in the flume. Balancing the aeroplane on this, he was counting on Mr. Camp's permission to throw open the head-gate, suddenly flood the flume with the pent up water, and, as the boat rushed forward, to gain an impetus that would start him on a new flight.

Bud's first sight of Little Town was the green railroad switch light at the settlement limits. He headed toward it, and, cutting out the village, passed diagonally over the adjacent fields in search of the road leading to the mill. At first, he missed it. The strain had made him nervous. Although he had not been in the air over fifteen

minutes, he felt as if he had been up an hour. He had thoughtlessly started in his shirt sleeves, and was chilled.

Everything seemed so desolate and quiet that there was an almost compelling temptation to make a descent and trust to luck. But the boy dismissed the idea, gritted his teeth, and, clutching the levers with his benumbed fingers, made another attempt to find the dark, winding country road.

"What am I goin' to do when I got to strike off over the woods from the mill?" thought Bud. "This ought to be pie compared to that."

Dropping lower and lower, the nervous young aviator finally brushed something light that rattled. He was over a field of corn in the shock. As he gasped and threw the car upward, again he heard the unmistakable "thud," "thud" of a horse's hoofs. Judging that they were on the unseen road, he continued his upward flight until he was out of possible sight, and then altered his course to bring him over the newly located road.

In a few moments, the sound of the horse and vehicle were far behind. Then he dropped down again until two dark lines marked the shrubby lined lane.

“Now for the old mill,” murmured Bud, greatly relieved.

It does not take long to cover three miles in an aeroplane. Almost before he could believe it, the sharp turn in the road, the wide clearing, the dark pile that he knew was the mill, and then the almost phosphorescent sheen of the dark mill-pond marked the end of the second stage of Bud's wild flight.

“If there 's anything in the old gypsy's ring, I can use it now,” muttered Bud. “It 's all blind from this on, but I reckon I know the way. Here goes, any way.”

With a bound upward, Bud headed the aeroplane over the trees beyond the mill-pond. Three hundred feet over the forest, he steadied the airship. But only for a moment. All was dark beneath, and yet Bud knew that the open marsh and lake were just ahead. From that point, he might as well have closed his eyes. It was all luck and instinct now.

Catching his breath, the boy lowered his horizontal rudders. With his eyes glued on the seemingly endless black beneath him, he leaned further and further forward. Twice he started upright, twice he hesitated, and then, with feverish speed, his hand shot out and shut off the

engine. The propellers died away, but the car plunged ahead with its speed apparently unchecked.

Lower and lower sank the drifting aeroplane. Again Bud leaned nervously forward to catch some sign of the margin of the water. What had happened? He had surely gone a mile! In the still night air came a sudden splash. With it, rose the guttural honk of a bull frog. The sound was dead ahead and almost beneath him.

With renewed energy, he swung his vertical rudder lever and the car drifted quickly to the right. Under the impulse of the turn, it darted downward. There was a rasping brush against the tall, dry swamp vegetation and the aeroplane, touching first with its starboard end on the soft marsh bed, settled with a dragging jolt on the weeds and grasses.

There was a breaking creak, as the end of the framework struck, but when Bud knew the flight was at an end he sank back into his seat with a gulp of relief.

"I 'm here," he sighed, "right among the snakes and frogs. Maybe the machine 's busted, and maybe not. Anyway, I 've got a fine long job of waitin' for day."

He was breathing as if he had just finished a

race. When he had got around to normal again, he made an attempt to get his bearings. With his hands on the framework, he crawled from the car. His feet sank into the soft ground and water oozed into his deep foot prints. Then he listened. He fancied he heard the soft lap of water just ahead. That meant the lake. But it was useless to try to reach it. The margin led nowhere and it would be softer than where he was.

A good deal of the romance of his adventure disappeared at once. It was exciting enough to navigate an aeroplane through the pathless black sky; but it was far from interesting or comfortable to sit up all night with the chill air numbing his coatless body and keep sleepless company with bugs, frogs and snakes in a damp marsh.

"And I ain't goin' to," exclaimed Bud. "The marsh gets softer toward the lake, but it gets firmer toward the hill."

He debated and hesitated for an hour, growing colder and more miserable all the time, and then, in desperation, he got stiffly out of the chair on which he had been cramped and plunged through the bog toward the high ground.

The mucky swamp was bad enough and, more

than once, Bud thought himself hopelessly mired. But in the end, exhausted, his face and hands scratched with the weeds he had fallen against and his trousers and shoes a coat of clayey black mud, he fell over a boulder and tumbled out onto dry land.

What turned out to be as great a strain was the effort to make his way through the woods to Camp's Mill. Bud was no coward, but there is something about a journey at midnight through an owly, twig-snapping wood that is apt to give any one the creeps. When the double darkness of the thick trees finally gave way to a more open gloom, and Bud knew the Camp home was somewhere just ahead, he broke into a dead run, a cold perspiration thick all over his body.

And, as he at last found the gate of Josh's home and a deep-barking dog lunged at him, he was about ready to pronounce Madame Zecatacas' ring a failure. But his troubles for the night were over. Josh's father, responding to the watchdog's bark, demanded to know what was wanted. In a few moments, Bud was taken in. It as hard to explain the situation, but Bud's condition was almost explanation enough. In an hour, refreshed with milk, bread and butter and cold ham, the airship thief was put to sleep in the spare room.

CHAPTER XII

THE ROMNEY RING BRINGS NEWS.

"Hello, Josh. What time is it?" called Bud, sticking his head out of the window of the spare room. The sun was high in the sky, and Bud, just awake, had caught sight of his friend crossing the dooryard with a milk pail in his hand.

"Time the milkin' was over," answered Josh. "But I ain't had hardly no time yet. I been over to see her, Bud. She 's a jim dandy."

Bud, in Josh's rough but freshly ironed night shirt, leaned further out of the window. His eyes were yet blinking, but the mention of "her" brought him to his full senses at once. He had slept late, worn with the exertion and strain of the night before, and Mr. Camp had not awakened him. The near-by mill was already groaning with its daily grist, and breakfast was undoubtedly over.

"She ain't broke anywhere is she?" asked Bud eagerly.

"How 'd I know? I been down there to the lake, but you don't reckon I been over where she is? But she looks fine as silk."

"You 've got to help me to-day, Josh," went on Bud, beginning to skin off his chum's long night gown.

Josh had come up to the window and was peering into the sacred precincts of the spare room.

"That 's what I calklated," he said, setting down his steaming milk pail. "An' that 's why I did n't dig over in the mud when I was down to see her. We got trompin' enough 'thout lookin' for more."

The bedroom was cool and grateful; the high feather bed, with its blue and white tasseled counterpane looked more than tempting, but Bud had only two thoughts now—he smelled frying ham, and he was anxious to see whether his airship was injured.

"Where 's my clothes?" he exclaimed, looking for them in vain.

"Oh, yes, I forgot," explained Josh. "They 're dryin'. You can't wear them pants afore noon. I dunno as yo' kin wear 'em then."

"But my shoes?"

"Them 's as bad. We got oats in 'em dryin' 'em out. Mother washed your pants first thing this mornin'."

Bud laughed.

"That 's mighty good o' you folks. But I

can't stay here. I got a lot to do. I mean *we* have."

"We figured that all out," laughed Josh. "Your things 'll be dry by noon. This mornin' yo' kin have my plow shoes an' ole mill pants."

When Bud emerged from the dustless and spotless bedroom to go to the basin bench out near the well, he was attired as if for a masquerade. Josh's pants were so long that they had to be rolled up, and his old shoes were much too large. After a good wash up and an elaborate combing of his hair, he responded to Mrs. Camp's smiling call to breakfast.

"It certainly is good fun sore eyes," commented Josh's mother as Bud sat down to breakfast—all alone—"to see Bud Wilson agin. I ain't seen hide n'r hair o' you in ten year, I reckon. An' how air ye?"

Bud, between mouthfuls of fried ham, biscuits and pancakes, told of his life since he went to live with Autorn y Stockwell. It took some time.

"An' who 's on your pa's farm?" asked Mrs. Camp.

Bud shook his head.

"I guess it 's been sold," he ventured.

"Must a brought a good price," suggested

Mrs. Camp. "It was a good piece o' groun', as I recollec'."

Bud shook his head again.

"I don't know," he said, his mouth full of cakes and maple syrup, "like as not. Only I did n't see none o' the money ef it was."

Mrs. Camp eyed him closely. Then she shook her head in turn.

"I reckon ye ain't old enough yet to be told. But somepins comin' to you, Bud. Don't ye fer-git that. It was a good piece o' land and it'd bring a good price."

"Oh, that 'll work out all right," laughed Bud, with boyish indifference—but drinking in every one of Mrs. Camp's words just the same. "This charm is goin' to bring me good luck."

Then he explained the part that Madame Zecatacas, the Gypsy Queen, had played in his recent experiences, and exhibited his ring. At that moment, Josh's father, Mr. Camp—"Stump" Camp—as he was generally known, entered the kitchen from the mill. He was a small man, with large and bushy tobacco-stained whiskers and considerable curiosity. Bud repeated the story of the ring.

"Jack Stanley," exclaimed Mr. Camp with a hearty guffaw. "Why, I 'm sprized, Bud, ye

don't know him. He ain't no gypsy, an' he ain't no Stanley, 'though all them horse traders give out they 're gypsies, an' most o' 'em say they 're Stanleys. You know him, Mother," he said, turning to his wife. "He 's ole Bill Reed's boy 'at run off with Red Stanley's gang. I knowed 'em all. Red Stanley's wife set up fur a great fortune teller, an' she had a sign sayin' she was Madame Somepin or Ruther."

"Madame Zecatacas?" interrupted Bud.

"That 's it," said Mr. Camp. "I seen her three years ago to the fair. I knowed 'em all. They traded through this country a good many years. They used to camp over nigh Little Town. That 's where John Reed, old Bill Reed's boy, fell in with Stanley's girl, an' followed the gang away."

"Shore," commented Mrs. Camp, "I recollect. And want it ole man Reed 'at sold that sixty acres to Bud's pa?"

Mr. Camp knit his brows a moment, expectorated slowly into the wood box, and then nodded his head.

"How 'bout that, Bud?" he exclaimed suddenly. "How did that trouble 'bout your pa's farm ever come out?"

"I did n't know there was any trouble about it," answered Bud. "What do you mean?"

Mr. Camp looked surprised. Then he slapped his knee.

"Bud," he almost chuckled, "you hang onto that ring and hang on to John Reed, or 'Jack Stanley' as he calls hisself. Ef I ain't mistook, he kin do ye some good."

Bud was alert.

"I feel it in my bones he is goin' to help me somehow. What is it?"

"I kin see that lawyer as took ye in never told you. But everybody up this way knows the facks. I ain't desirin' to make no trouble fur nobody, and may be 't ain't my say, but facks is facks."

"You mean 'bout the deed?" interrupted the rotund Mrs. Camp, who was one of those country women who know what is going on around them.

Mr. Camp nodded his head. Then he scratched his chin through his luxuriant whiskers and remarked, in a slow, judicial tone:

"Bud, when your pa bought that sixty acres o' ole man Reed, he give eighty dollars a acre fur it. Bein' a easy-goin' man not used to that sort o' business, he took the deed and stuck it away when he ought a' took it to the courthouse

an' recorded it. One day when your ma's cousin, Lawyer Stockwell, was visitin' him and he was complainin', they took out the papers an', lo an' behold, they discivered that Mrs. Reed, ole Bill's wife, had n't jined in the transfer."

"The lawyer took the paper, as your pa told me more 'n onct, fur I knowed him well, an' set out to get Mrs. Reed's name to the dockymment. That 'd been easy enough like as not on'y it was jest about the time Mrs. Reed and Bill fell out and sepyrated. She 'd gone to Indinoplis and afore the lawyer could ketch her, she was off to Calyfornee. Mr. Stockwell went clean out there to find her onct, but he never did."

Bud remembered the time. It was just after his father's death. But his foster father had never told him that the trip concerned him or his father's farm.

"What difference did that make?" asked Bud.

"Made jest this. Ole Bill Reed died, and there wa'nt really no good deed to your pa. He was dead, too, then. The place was yours because your pa paid for it with hard cash, but the title was bad. Ain't no one ever goin' to buy the place from you—an' its worth a hundred dollars a acre now o' any man's money, lessen you go get your title cleared up."

Bud smiled.

"That all sounds right," he said, "and I reckon I ought to understand it. But I don't."

Mr. Camp laughed, too, and looked at his wife.

"Lawyer Stockwell understands it all right, mother," he said chuckling. "It 's this way, Son. There 's only two persons who kin give you a clean title to that land which you heired from your pa. An' that 's them as is Ole Bill Reed's heirs. An' ef you want to know who them air, it 's Jack Stanley an' his wife."

Bud sat up trying to understand.

"Ef any one has claims on that farm besides you," Mr. Camp continued, "it 's John Reed and his wife. An' they ain't got no genoine claim except to do the fair and square thing and that 's what ole Bill and his wife did n't. Ef they 're your friends, they 'll do it. An' when they do an' give you a deed to what your pa hones'ly paid fur, Bud Wilson 'll have as clean an' tidy a bit o' ground as they is in Scott County."

The boy's brow was wrinkled.

"You say my foster father understands? What do you mean? How is he interested in all this?"

"Far be it from me to make reflections," said Mr. Camp slowly, "but lawyers has more tricks

an' one. I ain't sayin' he 'd do it. But what ef he or some one else 'd buy that sixty acres o' Jack Stanley. Where 'd you come in?"

"I see," answered Bud, "but I can't think you 're right. Any way," he added, "I 'll keep my eyes open. As for this," and he whirled the dull, brassy circle on his finger, "I guess it 's workin' all right. It ain't brought me anything bad yet—exceptin' my muddy pants and the swamp."

Mr. Camp's return to the house had been prompted by curiosity. When Bud had asked a few more questions about his father and the farm, Mr. Camp suggested that it would be well to hurry to the stranded aeroplane.

"Will you help me?" asked Bud eagerly.

"Will we?" answered Josh, speaking for his father and himself. "When a real show comes right out here in our front yard without no charge to see it—I guess we 'll see it ef we have to shet down the mill."

"It 's most as good as goin' to the fair," chuckled his father.

Mrs. Camp gave a sigh of disappointment.

"You ain't a goin' to miss it, Mrs. Camp," spoke up Bud promptly. "I 'm goin' to start back to town about twenty minutes of three

o'clock. You be waitin' out in the yard. I 'll sail right over the house. Do n't be scared if I come close to you. I 'll do it so you can see the airship."

"I jes can't nacherly believe it," exclaimed the good-natured woman.

"And if you 'll let me, I 'll come back and stay with you again to-night," added Bud. "That is, if you 'll let me pay for my board an' lodgin'."

"Pay?" exclaimed Mrs. Camp indignantly.

"Come on and quit your foolish talk," added her husband.

A curious and laughable sight in his borrowed clothes, Bud, Josh and Mr. Camp set out for the lake.

"She 's right down among the cattails," explained Josh. "An' mighty nigh in the pond. You had a close call a gittin' ducked."

This was true, as Bud soon discovered. The day was fine, with only a light September haze in the air. Standing on the slope of the hill—which completely concealed the machine from a possible traveler on the wood road—Bud and the two Camps began speculating on the best way to approach the aeroplane. No one was anxious to plow through the deep mire of the

swamp unless it was necessary. The solution was easy.

The skiff and flat boat were moored at the bottom of the pond near the closed head-gate. To reach these, there was a board path or footway running along the flume from the creek. A half mile detour brought the party there. In a few moments more, they were all at the dam and the boats. Bud had explained his plans for moving the aeroplane by loading it onto the boats and floating it to the head of the flume. Mr. Camp reckoned the project feasible.

But, when the two boats had been brought as near the stranded machine as they would float, and Bud, stripped of his trousers, underclothes, shoes and socks, had crawled through the weeds and mud to the airship, his fears were realized. Although the starboard end of the car was partly buried in the mud, the keen-eyed lad at once discovered that the bottom cross piece of the frame was broken.

Making further examination of the craft, his eye fell upon the gasoline tank. A sudden alarm came over him. He knew he had enough fuel to carry him safely back to the fair-grounds; but that would not suit all his needs. He meant to return to the fair, give the advertised exhibition

by flying three times around the race-track, and then escape once more. If he could do this, he would keep the aeroplane hidden until the next day, which was Saturday. When he returned that day, he would come down. The fair would be over.

But to do this meant more gasoline. He returned to his waiting friends and reported. There was a hasty consultation, and this program was agreed upon: Josh was to hook up a horse to the spring wagon and proceed at once to Little Town for five gallons of gasoline; Bud was to return to the mill and secure a few pieces of wood and some wire to repair the broken cross piece; Mr. Camp was to stay by the aeroplane and clear away the interfering weeds as well as he could.

“And,” volunteered Mr. Camp, as the boys left, “sense we ’re all a goin’ to be workin’ purty hard this mornin’ tell Mother to get us up a pot-pie dinner with mashed potatoes. Ef any one asts fur me at the mill, tell ’em we ’re shet down.”

CHAPTER XIII

A UNIQUE STARTING DEVICE.

“Anyway,” exclaimed Bud, after he had returned with his supplies and made another examination of the aeroplane, “the engine is in good shape. The landing skids kept it above the weeds and it ’s as dry as a bone.”

Half naked, the boy went to work on the airship, and, with no little annoyance from mosquitoes and sunburn, he soon had the broken cross-piece mended.

Meanwhile, the two mill hands had managed to secure a couple of substantial fence planks, each about ten feet long. While Bud tested each brace in the car—fortunately the front and rear rudders and the two propellers escaped without a scratch—Mr. Camp and his hands beat down the tangle of cattails and flags. By using the fence boards to walk on, a temporary tramway was made and when the busy young aviator was ready to move his car, the planks were laid ready for the first ten-foot lift.

“Now then,” called out Mr. Camp, as the three

men and Bud took their places, "Right up to yer shoulder and then all together."

With Mr. Camp and Bud in front and the others just behind them—all standing on the narrow boards—they slowly raised the frame into the air. At the end of the improvised walk, the car was gently eased to the beaten-down weeds and the boards were shoved forward. Again, the aeroplane was lifted and carried another ten feet. The next lift would bring the frame to the water's edge.

Before this was made, Bud lined up the two boats about fifteen feet apart and anchored them between oars and sticks stuck in the mud. Then, every one removing his shoes and trousers, the airship squad got its shoulders under the machine once more, and, splashing and slipping in the shallow water and mud, carefully laid the aeroplane on the boats.

"This is all new business to me," said Mr. Camp, slapping at the mosquitoes, thick on his unprotected legs, "but I 'm ketchin' on. An' I got an idee a'ready," he added knowingly. "I see what you 're figgerin' on, Bud. Ef ye git back here to-night, don't land on the marsh. Ef ye 'll jest make a landin' over yender on the slope o' the hill ye can git out o' all this trouble."

“But I ’d have as much trouble gettin’ the car over to the flume to raise it again,” suggested Bud.

“That ’s where you ’re mistaken, and’ that ’s where my idee comes in. I reckon ye *kin* start in the flume, but that ’s fur frum bein’ the easiest way.”

“What would you do?” asked Bud, with rather a patronizing smile.

“Well, as I figger it out,” said Mr. Camp, parting his flowing beard to expectorate, “all ye want is a run fur yer money. There ’s more ways o’ gettin’ a runnin’ start than on a boat. When you git back to-night, I ’ll have an old spring wagon I got up thar nigh the top o’ the hill. An’ I ’ll have her greased good an’ plenty. Tomorrer we ’ll put the flying-machine on the wagon an’ Josh in the shafts. When he gits goin’ down hill ef he don’t beat this ole flat-boat I ’m a liar.”

“Mr. Camp,” laughed Bud, approvingly, “if it was n’t for gettin’ the aeroplane over the marsh and on the hill, I ’d try it to-day. That ’s a bird of a way.”

“Oh, I ’m purty handy that away,” remarked the mill owner in a satisfied tone.

Mr. Camp and one of the men climbed into the boats to balance the long frame, while the other man and Bud, keeping within wading distance of the shore, began the task of pushing the boats the quarter of a mile or more to the dam. Before they reached the lower end of the pond, Josh could be seen making his way laboriously up the plank walk along the flume, pushing a wheelbarrow loaded with the wood-encased can of gasoline.

It was nearly noon, and, by the time the aeroplane had been lifted from its floating foundation and deposited safely upon the clay dam or levee, the distant but welcome sound of Mr. Camp's dinner bell could be heard.

"There don't seem to be any risk in leaving it here," suggested Bud. "There is n't a living thing in sight except birds. And, anyway, I've got to get my clothes, to say nothing of that chicken potpie."

"I don't know about that," said Josh doubtfully. "Mebbe I better stay. They been a telephonin' ever' where 'bout a lost flyin' machine. Somebody called up the store in Little Town this mornin' while I was there, astin' ef any one had heerd o' a lost flyin' machine."

Bud showed some alarm.

"Don't be skeered, son," exclaimed Mr. Camp. "Thet ain't because they think it 's up this way. They probable been telephonin' all over the county."

It was finally agreed that Josh should remain on guard, and that his dinner should be brought to him. After getting into their clothes, the others started for the house. On the way, Bud was in a deep study. He had no concern about his return to the fair-ground and no fear but what he would give a successful exhibition, but what was to follow? Certainly Attorney Stockwell and Mr. Dare and the deputy sheriff would be on the watch for him.

And, if they were looking out for the stolen aeroplane, they would not only see it approaching, but they would see the direction it took on leaving. On a fast horse, a man might almost keep close enough on the track of the retreating car to see it come down. After that, it might be only a question of a few hours search. You can't well hide a forty-foot wide expanse of white canvas.

"Mr. Camp," said Bud, at last, as they hurried along over the wood road, "you figured out that starting apparatus so well, maybe you can help me out of some other trouble."

He related his predicament as he saw it. The old man wagged his jaws and stroked his long whiskers.

"Gimme a little time," he replied at last. "That 's a purty tough problem, but mebbe I kin git some answer to it."

At the house, it was like a holiday.

"Seems jes like Sunday with the mill shet down," remarked Mrs. Camp, opening a can of pickled pears. "You all git ready right away. Dinner's all dryin' up."

Bud changed his clothes—Mrs. Camp had even pressed his pants—and the four men soused and scrubbed themselves, and all took turns with the hanging comb. Then they filed in to dinner. It was n't a question of light or dark meat of the chicken with Mr. Camp when he served the pot-pie. The half spoon and half dipper plunged into the smoking soup tureen came up charged with gravy, dumplings and meat. Into the center of this, went the mashed potatoes, with butter melting on top of the pile.

In the midst of the dinner, Mr. Camp suddenly balanced his knife on his hand, struck the table with the butt of his fork and exclaimed:

"I 've got her, Bud."

"Got what, Pa?" broke in Mrs. Camp, ner-

vously, as she sprang up and looked into the pot-pie bowl.

Her husband smiled, pounded the table again, and went on:

"Sure as shootin', Bud, them fellers is agoin' to foller you. Mebbe you could go right back there to the lake an' never be discivered, and mebbe not. 'Tain't no use takin' chances. Jest you hold yer horses, finish yer pie, an' I 'll put a bug in yer ear."

"You 've got a way to hide me?" exclaimed Bud eagerly.

"I hev that. An' it 's simple as A. B. C."

With most profuse thanks to Mrs. Camp for all she had done for him and many promises to come and see her later if anything prevented his return that night, Bud took farewell of his hostess. The men had already left with Josh's dinner. Out in the open space between the dooryard and the mill, Mr. Camp, helping himself to an ample supply of Kentucky twist, explained to Bud the details of his plan for concealing the aeroplane that night. It did not have to be told twice. The exuberant boy chuckled with delight.

"Mr. Camp," exclaimed Bud, "If I ever get my farm, I 'm goin' to buy an aeroplane. It 's

goin' to be a two-seater, too. An' the first passenger 'at rides with me 'll be you."

"Well, sir," replied the farmer mill owner, twisting a lock of his whiskers about his horny finger and shaking his head, "don't you worry about me bein' afeered."

It was n't an hour after the working squad reached the dam and head gates again until the areoplane was ready for flight. The gasoline tank was full, the oil cups were charged and the engine—to the joy of Mr. Camp and his hands—had been tested and found in order. The flat boat had been lifted over the head-gate and was on the flume ready to dart away upon the rushing flood of water when the head-gate was raised. Finally, the bird-like framework had been balanced on the thwarts of the flat boat, and nothing remain but to wait for the time to start.

It was then a quarter after two o'clock. Nearly a half hour remained before leaving time. In spite of the plan proposed by Mr. Camp, Bud, it was further suggested, ought to lose no opportunity to mislead his almost certain pursuers. This meant that he should arrange his flight from the fair-grounds so that he would head west. That would take him away from Scottsville and toward a bit of low ground about four miles west

of the fair-ground. Both sides of this were heavily timbered.

“Ef ye kin git down thar in the ‘slashins’ afore they git too clost to ye,” explained Mr. Camp, “an’ it ain’t too dangersome to git clost to the groun’, ye kin make a quick turn an’ shoot along in the valley till ye come to the ole Little Town road. An’ that ’ll take ye furder in the hills. Like as not ye kin git clean away unbeknownst to ’em.”

“I ’ll try it,” exclaimed Bud. “But I reckon it don’t matter much. We got ’em cinched if I ever get back here. And I ’ll be here about a quarter to four,” he added.

Mr. Camp’s plan did credit to the old man’s ingenuity. This is how he explained it to Bud:

“Ye see the saw house down there?” he began. “Well, sir, ’at ’s fifty feet long, or more. An’ ye see that track? They ’s a car ’at runs on that to haul the logs into the shed to be sawed. When ye git back, ye ’ll come right here and land afore the mill. Me an’ Josh an’ the hands ’ll be waitin’ an’ the log car ’ll be all ready. Afore ye kin say Jack Robison, we ’ll have thet flying-machine on the log car an’ in the shed.”

“And the doors closed,” added Bud enthusiastically.

"Not by no means. That would be suspicious like 'cause they ain't never shet. This afternoon, they 'll be two pulleys rigged up in the comb o' the shed all ready to yank the flyin'-machine up agin the roof—clear o' the car."

"But they 'll see it!"

"They 'll be some pieces o' timber all sawed to run acrost under the machine like as if it was a kind of a second floor. An' they 'll be plenty o' loose boards all stacked to lay on them jice. I been kind o' needin' a attic there any way," laughed the grizzled mill owner. "An' ef them jice is old timber an' the floor is old boards, I reckon ain't no one goin' to suspicion it 's all been made suddent like. An' it don't 'pear to me any one's goin' to take the trouble to look up in the attic fur no airplane."

It was at this point that Bud had chuckled. Then his enthusiasm cooled.

"How about getting another start?" he asked suddenly.

Mr. Camp chuckled in turn.

"Did n't I tell you about the hill and the spring wagon and Josh for a engine?"

"And we 'll carry it over there?"

"The log wagon can be made thirty feet long," drawled Mr. Camp with another laugh. "We 'll



THE START FROM THE FLUME.

haul it there like one o' them poles they raise at the rallies."

As these details were gone over again, the old mill owner kept a close eye on his thick silver watch. At twenty-five minutes of three, he arose with the importance of Dewey at Manila.

"Well, Bud," he exclaimed, extending his gnarled hand—his jaws working vigorously, as they always did in moments of excitement, "time 's up. An' good luck to ye."

It was an exhilarating moment for Bud. Stationing Josh and one of the men at either end of the balanced airship, he knocked the block from under the front of the flat boat, while the other mill hands held the stern of the boat. Then, tightening his hat, Bud took his seat, and rapidly tested all levers.

"Hold on, boys," he said soberly, "until I yell 'Go.' "

"Air ye all ready?" exclaimed Mr. Camp standing over the head-gate with the lever that swung it up in his hand.

Bud turned in his seat, set the engine going, and then watched the propellers begin to whirl. As their speed increased and the car began to tremble, he said in a low voice to Mr. Camp:

"Turn her on!"

As the heavy-muscled man threw himself upon the lever and the gates slowly rose, the banked up water rolled out beneath them like a wave of oil. As the released flood shot under the car, Bud was firm in his seat, both hands on the levers. There was a bob of the flat boat upward, and the boy shouted, "Go!"

For a moment only, the boat seemed to pause like a chip on the brink of an angry waterfall, and then, carried upon the crest of the new torrent, it shot forward like a rock falling. There was time only for a few swift blows on the sides of the flume, and then the aeroplane, rising from the impetus of its unique flight, leaped forward and began to rise. Bud did not turn, but he waved his hand in jubilation. The airship was safely afloat.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EXHIBITION UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

It would require considerable space to describe what took place when President Josiah Elder reached the fair-ground, after receiving Bud's message, and found the airship shed empty. A good share of his anger he took out on poor Jim Hoarr, the watchman. And yet, Jim could give no better explanation than that Bud Wilson had suddenly appeared, out of breath, a short time before, handed him the message, and sent him on the run to the telephone in the ticket office.

Mr. Elder then read the message at first hand. After that while he still berated the watchman, he began to think. What did it all mean? Who were "they?" And why were "they" attempting to take the aeroplane. After all, it could mean only one thing. It must mean Mr. Dare. The angered expert was probably up to some trick. And if he was, the thing had probably not yet been attempted. Sending his horse and buggy away, the fair official withdrew to the airship shed, dropped the front curtain, lit a cigar

and sat down to await developments. Under a box, he hid a lighted lantern.

About ten o'clock he was rewarded. Under instructions, the watchman remained quiet, when stealthy footsteps approached and the front curtain was raised. Waiting until three figures had crawled into the shed, Mr. Elder suddenly drew his lantern from its shelter. Before him stood the discomfited Attorney Stockwell, Mr. T. Glenn Dare and the deputy sheriff.

"Good evening, gentlemen," exclaimed the waiting president. "Anything I can do for you?"

Attorney Stockwell put on a bold front. At the same time, he looked about in open surprise. The aeroplane was gone.

"We 're here on an order of the Court, Josiah," began the lawyer. "I 've been retained by Mr. Dare to protect his rights."

"What rights?"

"That 's not for me to pass on. It 's in the hands of the Court. Mr. Dare has made affidavit that the aeroplane we bought has n't been paid for, and that he 's entitled to its possession. The Court, so far, agrees with him. The officer of the Court is here with a writ to take charge of the apparatus."

"All right," replied Mr. Elder. "Help yourself."

"It is n't necessary for me to say this is no laughing matter, Josiah. It ain't what you and me think. The Court has ordered the sheriff to take charge of the machine."

"I recognize the power of the Court," responded the president. "I shan't interfere."

"If you knew of this writ and have concealed Mr. Dare's property, of course, you know you can be cited for contempt."

"I did n't know of it, and I have n't concealed the aeroplane," answered Mr. Elder, with a smile.

"Where is it?" demanded the lawyer.

Mr. Elder shook his head.

"Some one stole it," he added, with an increasing smile.

"Stole it?" exclaimed the lawyer and Mr. Dare together.

"This is all I know about it," added Mr. Elder.

"And you are entitled to know it, too, as a director of the fair."

He handed the perplexed and angry lawyer Bud's note. Attorney Stockwell read it, Mr. Dare looking over his shoulder. When he had finished, the lawyer, white with sudden anger,

folded the bit of paper and put it into his vest pocket.

"You 'll notice, Stockwell, that that note is addressed to me."

"I 'll just keep it as evidence. It may come in handy."

Mr. Elder slowly put his lantern on the ground and then stepped close to the lawyer's side. Holding out his hand he said, in a tone that made Jim, the watchman, also step forward:

"Hand me that note."

The lawyer stepped back. Then he weakened. Drawing the scrap of paper from his pocket, he handed it to his fellow director.

"Are you backin' him up in this?"

"Stockwell," answered Mr. Elder, "in the last two or three days, I 've seen a good deal of your adopted son, and to-night, I 've seen a good deal of you. I don't know any more about what Bud has done or is going to do than this note tells. But I do know this. From this time on, when it comes to 'backin' him up, I think I 'll back him in any fight he makes against you."

"Thank you," sneered the lawyer. "All I can say is, you 're goin' to have your hands full. An' you can begin your meddlin' just the minute this young thief lands on these grounds to-mor-

row. He 'll be arrested and charged with larceny. If you interfere, I 'll give you all the fight you want."

Mr. Elder turned to the silent expert.

"I ought to tell you, Mr. Dare," he said, ignoring the lawyer's threat, "that I telegraphed to your company to-day all the facts concerning your conduct. I also sent them a draft for the cost of the aeroplane, minus your fee. If they won't settle on that basis, you are welcome to the property." Then he laughed, "The next time you have a job like this and think you can come a confidence game on the country jakes, you 'd better select some town that has n't a Bud Wilson in it."

"Come on, Mr. Dare," said Attorney Stockwell pompously, "this fight 's just began. We 'll have our innings to-morrow. There 'll be no exhibition of our property on Saturday, at least. And that 's the big day."

"If there is n't," replied Mr. Elder, good naturedly, "it 'll be the first day your foster son has fallen down. He seems a little swift for you, Cyrus."

Before Mr. Elder could say more, the lawyer and his two companions stalked out of the shed.

It was always a question in Scottsville,

whether Friday or Saturday would be the banner day at the fair. From the looks of the grounds at ten o'clock the next morning, it was apparent that either the fine weather, good crops, or the aeroplane was working wonders. The enclosure was packed. Men, women and children swayed back and forth; ice cream, candy, "hoky poky," peanuts, toy balloons, whips, "tin-types," photographs, dusty shoes all told that the fair was in full swing. The "Wheel of Fortune" operators; the barkers at the "side shows;" the cries of the hatted Wild West young men who besought onlookers to "hit a baby and get a seegar," or informed others vociferously that "the cane you ring is the cane you get," made a hubbub the endless keynote of which was the shrill organ at the "merry-go-round."

"She 'll run twelve thousand people to-day," suggested Superintendent Perry to President Josiah Elder as the two came out of the ticket office.

"And half of 'em are here to see our flyin'-machine," answered Mr. Elder. "What do you 'spose that kid 's expectin' to do?"

"What are *you* expectin' to do?" answered the superintendent, with a half smile. "Ye don't need to fear but he 'll be here. But after

his show—what then? Ye kin be sure Stockwell 'll be ready to grab the outfit. An' then—how about to-morrow?"

Mr. Elder shook his head. Then he explained to Mr. Perry what the directors had done in the matter of offering to settle with the manufacturers.

"We 've telegraphed them that our eighteen hundred dollars is on the way, and told 'em how this expert o' theirs fell down. We 're expectin' an answer any time to-day callin' him off. If it don't come, we 'll fight 'em as best we can. But we 're all agreed we ain't a goin' to be held up. We won't pay Mr. T. Glenn Dare one cent. He can break up the show to-morrow, but we won't weaken."

At two o'clock it looked as if another person could hardly be crowded into the fair-grounds—at least, not near the exhibition buildings and concession tents. With the first tap of the bell in the judge's stand, like a field of snow slipping in a body down a mountain side, the heaving mass of humanity moved toward the race track. The five hundred dollar purse for the two-twenty pace marked the big feature of the speed contests and a new record was set for "grandstand" receipts.

But three men were not concerning themselves

with this event. Sitting complacently together, on a knoll under the only trees within the race track, were Attorney Cyrus Stockwell, T. Glenn Dare, the aviator, and Deputy Sheriff Pusey. They were waiting to see how Bud Wilson was going to keep his word. One heat of the big race, delayed as usual, had been run, and the first heat of the next event "green trotters without a record" had been disposed of when two other men left the judges' stand and made their way toward the empty airship shed or "aerodrome." These were President Elder and Superintendent Perry. They were the reverse of complacent.

It was only a few minutes of three o'clock and the space about the aeroplane house was black with people. Jim Hoarr, the watchman, keeping the canvas front of the shed closed to conceal the fact that there was no aeroplane within the house, wondered what would happen when the curious crowd learned that the house about which they were crowded was empty.

As the packed spectators gave way before Superintendent Perry's badge, Attorney Stockwell and his friends fell in the wake of the president and superintendent. The little party reached the shed together.

"Good afternoon, Josiah," exclaimed the lawyer, touching his fellow director on the arm. "You see we 're right on time. I hope Bud makes good his promise."

Mr. Elder scowled.

"If he don't," continued Attorney Stockwell, "what explanation are you going to make? I see you have quite an audience."

He waved his hand about him, to include perhaps ten thousand persons who had paid their money to see the airship.

Mr. Elder looked at his watch, swept the horizon with his eyes and scowled again. It was just three o'clock. "I reckon you 're in it as deep as I am, as far as the crowd knows," the president finally replied, in a low voice. "I—"

A sudden murmur ran through the surging crowd. Mr. Elder paused and looked quickly about. He saw nothing approaching, but before he could continue, an arm shot out from the field of spectators and pointed almost directly overhead. Then the mass of people began to melt away with thousands of "Ahs," and "Ohs" and "There she comes."

At least fifteen hundred feet in the air, Bud's stolen aeroplane was rushing forward to make its advertised exhibition. Where it had come

from, no one seemed to know. Not one of the men most interested had seen it until that moment, and it was swooping down upon the fairgrounds as if it had come from above the clouds. So high was it that, at the angle it was traveling, it had to pass over the grounds. The sight set the crowd off in a frenzy of excitement. In a cloud of dust, the eager spectators ran forward as if to follow the aeroplane. In its wake were the lawyer, his client, and the deputy sheriff.

Mr. Elder stood as if transfixed.

"I guess I 'll wait developments right here," he said, turning to Jim Hoarr. "Get the shed ready."

"I seen it," said Jim, "but I thought it was a bird."

"Where did he come from?" asked the fair official.

"Plumb out o' the north, but about a mile high. An' it sailed right over the ground afore it turned. Not fur me," added Jim, shaking his head.

Having passed out over the grounds again, the aeroplane was seen sweeping in a long curve on the turn. The scrambling crowd slackened, and the airship, five hundred feet above the trees, headed back again. For an instant, it darted up-

ward, and then, settling once more, made a curving swing toward the waiting thousands.

"Here she comes," rose in a deafening roar.

Bud's face could be made out for the first time. It wore neither smile nor alarm. It was as placid as marble. With his feet close together in his stirrups, his body erect and tense, his blue flannel shirt fluttering in the breeze, he held his course with the ease of a locomotive engineer.

"Now," exclaimed Attorney Stockwell to Deputy Pusey, "get your writ ready an' keep your eyes peeled. Nab him the minute he lights."

Once over the mob of upturned faces—gathered now mainly on the long stretch of the race-track—Bud's body swayed and his machine veered. In another moment, the aeroplane had altered its course and was on its way circling the grounds just above the track. Ten thousand people rushed forward in spontaneous excitement. Just off the track, Attorney Stockwell watched, breathed hard, and waited.

On the back stretch of the track, the aeroplane sank lower and lower until by the time the upper turn was reached, it was just over the heads of the spectators. Then, came the flight down

the track, over the crowd and in front of the grand-stand.

"I 'll show 'em I can travel where I please," said Bud to himself. "Hold on to your hats," he yelled suddenly, as he smiled for the first time.

With a dart, the car skimmed toward the jam of humanity like a swallow skims over a pond. Falling over each other, pushing, knocking and yelling, the crowd attempted to clear the track. There was a crash, and, as Bud swept onward, not over twenty feet above the ground, the track fence gave way, and the panic stricken crowd sank in confused heaps.

"Keep off the track," yelled Bud warningly.

From the judges' stand, the figure of Superintendent Perry suddenly leaped forward. In his hand, he waved his big black hat warningly.

"Git back there, git back," he called in a loud voice. "Git back, an' keep back, or some one 'll get killed."

At that instant, the aeroplane, like a yacht in a gale, swept by the grand-stand. There was the low hum of propellers, and the whirr of the engine, but not a creak from the car itself, and not a word or look from the gritty young aviator. A buzz of relieved admiration seemed to rise

like a breeze from the grand-stand, the thousands on the dust deep race-track caught their breath, and Bud had passed. His first circuit of the course had been made.

From the airship house on the center of the track, three figures were rushing forward. They had just made a discovery.

"Mr. Stockwell," Deputy Pusey had suddenly exclaimed as he saw Bud enter on his second lap, "do you know what he 's a goin' to do?"

The attorney had just suspected, but he was watching the flying car as if fascinated.

"He 's goin' to beat us after all," shouted the deputy, grabbing the lawyer's arm. "He ain't a goin' to land. He 's a goin' to fly away agin."

An awful word came from Mr. T. Glenn Dare's lips, and Attorney Stockwell, his face red with new anger, sprang forward as if to intercept the flying boy.

CHAPTER XV

THE ENEMY OUTWITTED ONCE MORE.

Just within the race-track enclosure and in the shade of the judges' stand, stood Deputy Sheriff Pusey's side-bar buggy and his famous roadster. The rig was known all over the county. Its appearance usually meant the service of a writ, a subpoena or a warrant. It was a forlorn hope, but, before the aeroplane had reached the far end of the track again, the deputy and Attorney Stockwell were in the buggy and the county official, his big official badge blazing on his blue coat and his official voice demanding that the crowd give way, were forcing a path through the packed crowd.

Before the horse could make much headway, the aeroplane was racing down the "stretch" once more—this time even nearer the ground. As the whirr of the engine struck on the horse's ears and the wide white planes of the car filled the width of the track just above, the horse reared, lunged forward, and the aeroplane had passed once more.

"Hello," rang out from the aeroplane at once. "Want me, Mr. Stockwell?"

There was a mutter of enraged words in the buggy, and then, the crowd, alarmed at the horse's actions, fell back in confusion. With a quick command, the lawyer spoke to his companion, and, with a glance at the aeroplane, already on the far side of the race-track on its next round, the frightened horse was forced through the crowd toward the head of the "stretch" down which the flying-machine would come on its next lap.

The turn was reached just before Bud arrived from the opposite direction.

"Now, Pusey," exclaimed the lawyer, grabbing the lines and whirling the horse about, "get on the seat and serve him ef you can. Get your writ ready. Ef he comes clost enough, grab him and hold on. I 'll take care of the horse."

Attorney Stockwell, whip in hand, headed the rearing animal down the track, yelling to the crowd to get out of the way. The massed people saw what was coming. Between the low-flying aeroplane and the galloping horse, a second injunction was not needed. As the track opened up before the snorting animal, already on a dead run, with its ears laid back, Deputy Pusey sprang to the seat of the buggy, and began to wave his writ.

Bud understood the situation as well as if it had been explained to him. A provoking smile came on his face, and with a reckless daring he headed the car straight at the deputy's head. Down the stretch together, came the foaming, galloping horse and the swiftly moving aeroplane. Holding with one hand to Attorney Stockwell's shoulder, the deputy sheriff—he had already lost his official hat—waved his writ and yelled:

“Hey, there, Bud Wilson, in the name of the law, Stop!”

“Busy,” cried out Bud. “See you to-morrow. Can't stop to-day.”

“You're under arrest,” shouted Attorney Stockwell.

The temptation was too great. Without answering, Bud gave the horizontal rudder a slight turn, and the speeding car shot at the deputy's wobbling form.

“Grab him,” shouted the lawyer, as the car dropped.

Spurred on by the jeers and hoots of the thousands watching the strange contest, the county officer made a feeble effort to respond. As he threw his body up in a half-hearted effort to

catch the car, now just overhead, the aeroplane sprang up once more.

"Good-bye," shouted Bud, "you 're too slow. See you later."

Deputy Pusey balanced himself for a second, and then tumbled forward between the foam-flecked horse and the light buggy. A dozen men grabbed the bridle of the horse, and the lawyer, with an effort pulled the deputy into the buggy.

As the machine sped by the judges' stand, Bud heard a voice:

"Good boy, Bud," it sounded jubilantly.

Bud glanced quickly, and saw President Elder, Superintendent Perry, and a crowd of other laughing and excited fair officials.

"Be back at three o'clock to-morrow," sang out the boy in response.

In another instant, his obedient craft was on the lower turn, and, with the shouts and cheers of the assembled multitude ringing in his ears, Bud prepared to make his escape. At the extreme end of the track, he threw the lever of the vertical rudder over so sharply that the car almost capsized. Like a bird with a wounded wing, the framework fell partly on its side. Bud's heart thumped. The ground seemed rushing up

to meet him. To even scrape the surface meant ruin to the car.

The boy retained his presence of mind and did the right thing. But the car had lost so much headway that it did not respond at once. It wavered, tried to recover itself and then, almost balanced, fell within five or six feet of the earth. Escape did not seem possible. The aeroplane was yet on an angle, and the low end of the frame was just escaping the ground. If it struck, Bud's work was over. Like lightning, the thought came to him that he must jump to escape the wreckage.

Just then, with the spring of an animal, a man's crouched form hurled itself from the ground beneath the dragging end. Bud's dry lips tried to cry out, but there was no time. His eye was quicker than his tongue. He saw the bronzed face of Jack Stanley, his gypsy friend, but no sound came from the boy's lips. As the gypsy's face flashed before him, something seemed to strike the car. A shock ran through the frame, and then, as if caught by a gale of wind, the dragging end of the frame flew up—the aeroplane, gathering speed, darted ahead, and the ship righting herself, began once more to climb skyward.

"Go it, Kid—yer all right!"

These words followed after Bud as he renewed his flight, and he realized that once again Jack Stanley had helped him over a crisis. Or, was it Madame Zecatacas' magic ring?

"If it 's the ring," thought Bud, "I 'm goin' to have still more use fur it. It 's got to make Jack and his wife sign the deed for me."

Straight west over the "aerodrome," the aeroplane took its new course as steadily and easily as if had not just escaped destruction. Several hundred feet in the air, Bud set the car on a level keel headed for the "slashings"—the valley some miles ahead.

He was well out of the grounds when Attorney Stockwell and the deputy untangled themselves from the dense crowd. But at no time, was he out of the lawyer's sight. To the indignation of the spectators, Mr. Stockwell forced the deputy's horse through the crowd and hurried toward the fair-ground entrance. There was no rear entrance leading in the direction Bud had flown, and in hastening to the main gate, the buggy had nearly a half mile to cover before passing from the enclosure. This was under trees and behind buildings that at once cut off the view of the disappearing aeroplane.

The road leading to the fair-grounds from the main thoroughfare or pike, ran north. Finally reaching the east-and-west road, the deputy's horse was put to a run. It was then a half mile further before the flying car could possibly be seen, as, for that distance, the main road ran between trees. It was not until ten minutes after the excited lawyer and the bruised deputy had started on their chase that they came out into the open road.

"There he goes," exclaimed Deputy Pusey, when they did.

"Giddap," shouted the lawyer, hitting the already galloping animal with the end of the lines. "He 's goin' like all sixty."

Almost directly ahead, and perhaps four miles away, the aeroplane hung like a bird. Without knowledge of what it really was, the object could not have been picked out for other than a bird in flight.

"I 'm afeered he 's given us the slip," added the deputy.

"He ain't goin' far," replied the panting lawyer, still slapping the already jaded horse.

"You 're right," sang out his companion. "He 's lightin' a'ready."

It seemed that this was true. The aeroplane,

which was no great distance in the air, was dropping slowly toward a distant line of trees.

"Comin' down in the woods," said Attorney Stockwell.

"Ain't that the aidge o' the 'slashins'?" exclaimed the deputy.

"Looks like it. Well, there ain't any place there to hide. It's all marsh or medder or underbrush," argued the lawyer. "Anyway, keep your eyes peeled to see 'at he don't come up again on the fur side."

Twenty minutes later, the pursuers mounted the high ground concealing the valley beyond. There was a final quick dash down the gully road, and the low ground spread out before them. The aeroplane was nowhere in sight.

"Well," began the deputy, "there ye are—all for nothin'."

The lawyer pointed his whip ahead. An old man, apparently in charge of a solitary cow whose bell had attracted the attorney's attention, was slowly coming toward them. The pursuers hastened ahead to meet the man.

"D' you see an airship sailing out here?" called out the attorney.

The herdsman looked up blankly. On a venture, Deputy Pusey addressed him in German.

Some intelligence came into the old man's face. Then he nodded his head and pointed north.

"He thought it was a big bird," explained the deputy with a sneer. "And he says it flew low like a hawk."

He questioned the man some minutes, and then added:

"As near as I can make out, the kid kept down below the trees and then disappeared in them. That means he probably kept going till he struck the Little Town pike about two miles north. He could n't fly into the trees. He 's took the Little Town road. Like as not he 's headed for Little Town."

The lawyer looked at his watch. It was three-forty-five.

"It 's no use to hurry now," he explained. "We 'll go on till we come to the section road and cross over to the Little Town pike. Then we 'll go to Little Town. We 'll probably meet some one who 's seen him. If we don't we 'll get supper at that place an' do some telephonin'. He can't hide that thing out in the open country."

Some minutes before Bud's estimated return, Josh Camp, perched upon the roof of the mill, set up a shout.

"Here he comes," was his cry to those waiting below, and almost before Josh could reach the ground, the bird-like craft was slowly drifting to rest in the mill place—the engine shut off, and the propellers at rest. Eager hands caught it and eased it to the ground, and Bud, trembling under the strain, climbed stiffly from his seat.

"I 've had the time of my life," he began abruptly. "Old Andy Pusey chased me around the track with some kind of a paper—said I was under arrest."

"Are they after you?" interrupted Mr. "Stump" Camp at once.

"Sure," went on Bud. "Mr. Stockwell and Andy had a buggy and Pusey's big bay horse. You can bet they 're after me. But I don't believe they saw me after I got in the 'slashina.' I did n't see them."

Bud's hands trembled so that he could scarcely assist in disposing of the aeroplane. But he was hardly needed. Before five o'clock, the airship had been hauled into the sawing shed on the log car, drawn to the roof by means of the waiting tackles and the false floor put into place. To the uninformed, a glance into the shed suggested as unlikely a place for hiding a forty-foot aeroplane as the top of a haystack.

It was yet an hour before supper time, and the irrepressible Bud and Josh set out at once to select a place for the next day's flight.

"An' don't be late," called out Mrs. Camp. "We got fried chicken, sweet potato pie and hickorynut cake."

About the time the Camps, Bud, and the hired hands were attacking a big platter of fried chicken, Attorney Stockwell and Deputy Sheriff Pusey were making the best supper they could out of yellow cheese, dried beef and crackers in the Little Town general store. This accomplished, the lawyer, tracing in a general way on a county map the probable course of the lost aeroplane, called by telephone those farmers who, in his judgment, might have seen the airship.

Fortunately for Bud, the Camp's Mill telephone was out of order. The operator in Scottsville could not tell what was the matter. She had no way of knowing that the wily mill owner had taken the instrument off the hook just after Josh announced the returning aeroplane was in sight. Josh's report that there had been telephoning in Little Town the day before was tip enough to the unlearned but crafty farmer.

But, unfortunately for Bud, an incident oc-

curred in the general store a little later that set the lawyer to thinking.

“Hey, Phil,” called out the proprietor, “I don’t see no charge o’ that five gallon o’ gasoline Josh Camp got this mornin’.”

Phil’s excuse was lost on Attorney Stockwell. He looked at Deputy Pusey significantly. The moment the officer’s horse had finished his oats, the two men were in the buggy hurrying toward Camp’s Mill, a locality as well known to both of them as to Bud. At seven o’clock, it was growing dusk. When the buggy turned from the road into the open space before the mill, Mr. Camp, Josh, and Bud were sitting on the porch, the former with his cob pipe. Mr. Camp nudged Bud, who rolled off the edge of the porch onto the grass and crawled around the house.

The greeting between the deputy and the mill owner was that of old friends, but Attorney Stockwell did not stop for civilities. He became officious at once.

“Say, Camp,” he exclaimed, “we have reason to believe you know something about some stolen property.”

Before he could say more, the deputy interrupted his companion to explain in detail what had happened. Then he added why they had

come to the mill, telling of Josh's gasoline purchase.

"Well," said Mr. Camp, drawing on his not very fragrant pipe. "Can't I buy gasoline if I like?"

"Don't beat around the bush," broke in Attorney Stockwell.

"Look a' here, Stockwell," exclaimed old "Stump." "I never did have the best opinion o' you. I don't like to say right out I think you 're a shyster cause I ain't lookin' to start nothin'. An' that 's more considerate than some bluffers I know."

"Have you seen the machine?" put in the deputy again, anxious to avoid trouble.

"I don't know much about the law," drawled the mill owner, "but I got a hunch I don't have to answer that less 'n I want to."

"Don't lose time with him," sneered the lawyer. "You have the authority. Search the place. I'll help you."

"So 'll I," volunteered Mr. Camp. "Ef ye find any flyin'-machine on this place or round about, yer welcome to it. Mr. Deputy, you do your duty. An' when you 're convinced, git."

The lawyer and the deputy began rather un-

systematically to look about the premises, starting first for the lumber piles below the mill.

"Better look in the mill afore it 's too dark," suggested Mr. Camp, pointing to the sawing shed.

The lawyer sneered again.

"I reckon we 'll look amongst them piles of timber," he exclaimed.

Deputy Pusey followed the mill owner up the little track to the long, open shed and peered inside.

"Like to climb up into the attic?" asked Mr. Camp, carefully filling his pipe, and nodding upward.

The officer smiled, turned and shook his head. When it was completely dark and the two searchers had returned to the buggy empty handed, Mr. Camp was sitting on the fence, his pipe sputtering and glowing in the black night.

"Camp," exclaimed Attorney Stockwell angrily, "I think you know a good deal more 'n you 're lettin' on."

"I reckon that 's right, Mr. Stockwell," drawled the mill owner, without changing his position. "I would n't be supprized ef I told all I knowed 'at a certain lawyer might take to the woods. D' you find any airships?"

With a curse, the lawyer sprang into his buggy and drove rapidly away. Before the buggy was out of sound, a small figure seemed to appear out of the grass back of the silent man on the fence. It was Bud, a little nervous, but with a wide smile.

“Say, Mr. Camp,” he exclaimed, “I was kind o’ scart when you askt ole Pusey to git up there in the attic where the machine was.”

“How ’s that?” asked the old man.

‘ ’Cause I was up there, hidin’.’

CHAPTER XVI

BUD DISCOVERS A FRIEND.

Even the fragrant restfulness of Mrs. Camp's spare bedroom did not make Bud sleep soundly that night. For almost the first time in his life, he was restless. In the morning, he was far from as lively as he had been the day before.

"What 's ailin' ye, Son?" began Mr. Camp when they sat down to the usual ham, eggs and biscuits. "You don't seem very peart to-day. Ain't afeerd air ye?"

Bud only shook his head and tried to smile.

"I did n't sleep well," was his answer. "I reckon I 'm tired o' all this excitement."

Mr. Camp looked at him closely, but said no more. When breakfast was over and Bud started toward the sawing shed, Mr. Camp followed him.

"Now ye better git it offen yer mind, Bud. Tell me yer troubles."

The boy made another feeble effort to say he was all right. Then, his voice trembling a little, he said hastily:

"I 'm kind o' lonesome, Mr. Camp. An' you

folks have been so good to me that it makes me all the lonesomer.”

The grizzled mill owner laughed.

“I don’t see why yer botherin’ ’bout that. We ain’t seen nur heerd much o’ ye fur a good many years. But your folks was purty good friends o’ mother an’ me. An’ ye knowed Josh. Why, Bud, it seems almost like as ye was related to us. We ’ll be glad to hev ye come out here whenever ye like.”

“I thank you, Mr. Camp. But I did n’t mean that exactly. I ain’t got no home now. An’ I ain’t got no education. An’ I ’m purt near too old to go to school ef I could.”

“Ain’t got no home?”

Bud related how he had been cast out by Attorney Stockwell; how all his worldly possessions were in the little bundle he had brought with him the night before; and how he had now in his pocket just five dollars.

Mr. Camp’s whiskers worked violently. He tried to ask two or three questions at once. Mainly, why Bud had n’t told him this, and how it happened that he was working for nothing in such a dangerous enterprise. The boy satisfied him as well as he could.

“Now,” interrupted the old man, at last, “I

ain't got but one thing to say. Yer a goin' to turn over this craft this evenin' to the fair folks, air ye?"

Bud nodded his head.

"An' ye 'll quit without no wages and without no home?"

Bud nodded his head again.

"Well, I 've give Josh leave to take the old sorrel and drive his mother to the fair to-day—I got to be the startin' engine myself. They 'll be there long afore you git there. When yer's flyin' 's all over, ye 'll git right into the spring wagon with 'em and come right out here to old 'Stump' Camp's. This here 'll be yer home till ye git another."

The tears came into Bud's eyes.

"I can't do that, Mr. Camp. I have n't any money—"

"Don't I need hands?" interrupted Mr. Camp, with assumed gruffness.

"If you 'll let me work for you?" began Bud. But again he was interrupted.

"Ye don't need to do that long," Mr. Camp hastened to say. "Your gaurdeen, Mr. Stockwell, did n't spare me none last night. If I ain't mistook there 's somepin comin' to ye, Bud."

An' I 'm goin' to make it my business to see 'at ye git yer jest dues."

"You mean the farm?" exclaimed Bud.

"Sure 's yer born," continued Mr. Camp, rubbing his chin. "An' mebbe more. I 've heered a good deal I ain't said nothin' about to you."

"But there 's Jack Stanley and his wife! They are the only ones who can help me, are n't they? You said they could give me a clear title to my property. I 've got to see them before they leave the fair to-night."

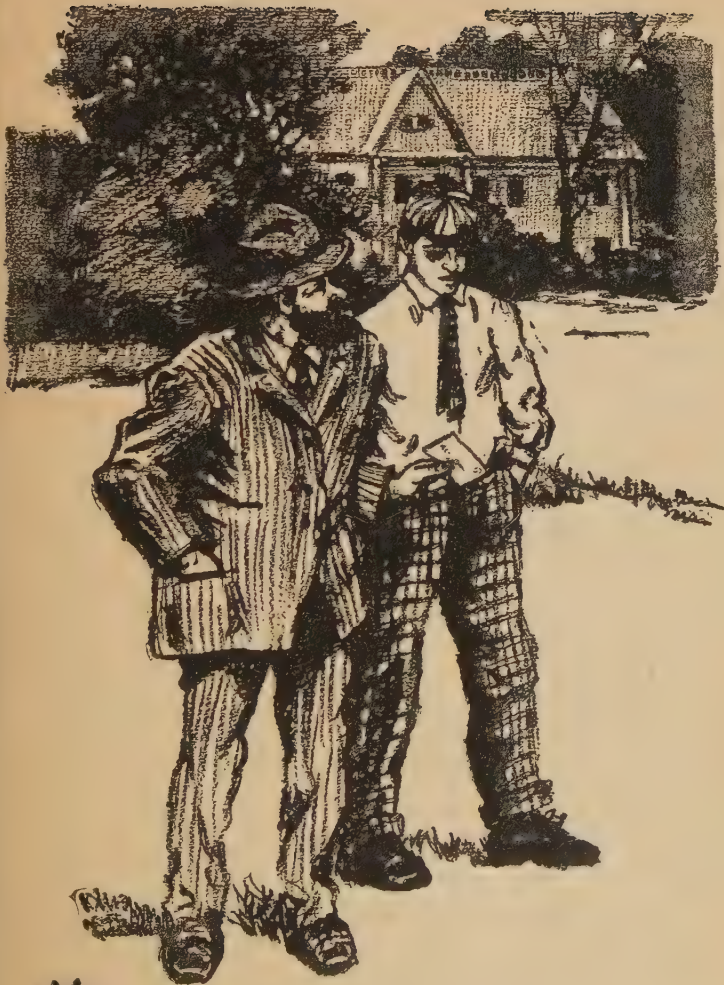
The old man slowly winked at the lad.

"Ketched," he chuckled. "I did n't mean to tell ye about it, Bud. But after Mr. Stockwell got so fresh with me las' night, I jes made up my mind to hand him somepin' an' help you a little at the same time."

The sawmill owner reached into the hip pocket of his trousers and drew out an envelope. On it, addressed in an awkward hand, were these words:

"Mr. John Reed or Jack Stanley,
Fair Grounds."

"That 's why Josh an' mother air a goin' to the fair," he chuckled again. "An' ef this don't bring my old friend Stanley's wife and



MR. CAMP DREW OUT AN ENVELOPE.

son-in-law out to Camp's Mill by to-morrer, I miss my guess."

"And you are doin' this to try to get them to fix my property for me?" Bud asked, his lip quivering.

"Oh, I 'm jes doin' it—that 's all," answered Mr. Camp. "Now, you set yer mind at ease. I ain't askin' no credit. I jes want to hear Cy Stockwell swear. That 's all."

When two o'clock came that day, Josh and Mrs. Camp were on the fair-grounds. Instead of the somewhat stiff mill owner, one of the mill hands had been substituted as the motive power to start the spring wagon down hill. Mr. Camp, the two hands and Bud had safely conveyed the aeroplane through the wood road, up over the hill (knocking down two fences in the process) and the greased spring wagon stood like an Atlas with the waiting airship balanced on its body.

In all its history there had been no such attendance on the Scott County fair as poured through the gates on this Saturday. The story of what Bud had done had at last become public, and the entire town was alive with gossip and comment. The details became such a sensation and were so well known that it was n't "Goin'

out to the grounds?" that day. The morning salutation was, "Goin' out to see Bud Wilson this afternoon?"

Lafe Pennington, now fully recovered, had been a spectator of Bud's return and escape. He had the good taste to make no comment, but it was a sore trial to his pride. After Bud's spectacular exhibition and flight the day before, President Elder, all smiles over his defeat of the enemy, was hastening from the judges' stand when he espied Lafe.

"Hello, Lafe," called out the jubilant official. Lafe wanted to escape, but he could n't. "Do you know what they 're all sayin', Lafe?" continued Mr. Elder, edging up to the embarrassed bank clerk. "They 're talkin' it around town that the old gypsy scared you. Folks say you were scar't to run the airship."

"Well, let 'em," retorted Lafe. "Talk 's cheap. They 'd be tellin' another story if they knew the facts. It ain't much to guide an aeroplane. But I 'd like to see any one else in this town set one up and get it ready."

"Well," continued President Elder, "you can shut 'em up next week if you want to. If we get our dispute adjusted over the flyin'-machine, we got an offer to make an exhibition at the

State Fair. It 's gone all over the state. Biggest thing any fair ever had."

Lafe was visibly disturbed.

"How 'd you like to try your hand up to the State Fair?" asked Mr. Elder, with pretended seriousness.

"You gentlemen have made your choice," faltered Lafe. "You 've picked out your operator. I ain't takin' none of Bud Wilson's leavin's."

As Lafe hurried away, Mr. Elder smiled. Although Lafe was again in the crowd the next day, he took good care to avoid the president.

Bud, now eager to escape from his responsibility, was a little ahead of time in reaching the grounds on his last flight. But he did not arrive before the crowd. The grand-stand, race track, and part of the enclosure were jammed again. The nervous eagerness, the restless scanning of the sky in all directions and the spectators' impatience were rewarded about five minutes before three o'clock, when the dark, oblong aeroplane was made out in the sky north of the grounds.

This day, the band was prepared, and as Bud whirled into the course, the vociferous musicians struck up *La Poloma*—more appropriate than the leader knew, as the translation of the Span-

ish means "The Dove." But Bud was n't a white dove that day. Old "Stump" Camp, either from a sense of humor or a love for the beautiful, had proposed and actually decorated the bare aeroplane framework with flowers.

The gaudiest blooms in Mother Camp's garden had been tied to the car uprights, and right and left of the young aviator were bunches of pink, red and white hollyhocks that met almost in an arch over Bud's head. At each end, there was single, mammoth sunflowers. Even across the track or course, the decorations could be made out, and the usual "Ahs" and "Ohs" soon swelled into a wave of amused admiration.

Again the crowd surged forward and back, horses backed and reared, and the band umpahed and quavered.

With knowledge born of the previous day's experience, the crowd parted as the circling car came into the head of the stretch on its first lap, and Bud had no occasion to call out warnings. He was greeted with salutations of all kinds. This time, with growing confidence, he felt able to look about. His eyes sought eagerly for his foster father, Mr. Dare, or the deputy sheriff.

Then he smiled and the crowd yelled. But Bud was smiling because his quick eyes had de-

tected what he hoped to find. Over in front of the deserted "aerodrome," he saw the three men. He had guessed right. Since the fair would conclude that day, Bud realized that there was no longer any object in trying to hide the aeroplane. Whatever legal fight was to be made could now be carried on without embarrassment to the fair association.

"My work 's done," Bud had said to himself. "All I want to do now is to turn over the machine and get away. And I 'm goin' to get away quick. They said I was under arrest. Not if I know it."

Then the aeroplane approached the crowded grand-stand. As it did so, Bud threw his vertical lever slightly to the starboard and brought the car just in front of the packed seats. Every one sprang up, open-mouthed and curious. As the graceful car drifted by the structure, the young aviator, smiling, reached out to the nearest of his vertical frames and jerked loose a large pink bundle. With another swift motion, the mass of pink went whirling through the air toward the spectators. Hundreds of spicy, clove-pinks separated and fluttered among the outstretched hands.

At considerable risk, Bud jerked off his hat and leaned forward.

"For the ladies," he shouted, "with the compliments of Mr. Elder."

In the roar of thousands of voices, yelling and laughing, the aeroplane shot by. On the back stretch of the track, Bud again made sure that Mr. Stockwell and Deputy Pusey were at the airship shed. As he passed on his second round, the cries were deafening.

"What 's the matter with the hollyhocks?"

"Give us a sunflower?"

"Have 'em all in a few minutes," thought Bud.

As the third round began, Bud set himself for his finish.

"They 'll certainly figure that I 'm going to come down to-day," he said to himself. "And I am. But not where they 're waitin' for me."

The natural thing for the aviator to do would be to pass by the grand-stand, thus completing his third circuit, and then, at the lower end of the track, to make a quick turn and head directly up the center of the enclosure to the shed. What every one expected, Bud did not do. He did n't propose to stop for explanations or to be arrested.

As the aeroplane approached the grand-stand, Bud made a sweeping turn into the track enclosure, shut off his power, and, with a graceful dip over the heads of the spectators, sank swiftly

toward the ground where the crowd had thinned into groups.

In the crowd was one young man who noted every movement of Bud's with a trained eye. Neither Bud nor those standing next to the square shouldered young stranger knew that Sergeant Morey Marshall of the U. S. Signal Corps, stationed at Omaha, had been rushed to Scottsville on the first express to observe and report on the daring flight of the amateur aviator. If Bud Wilson had known it part of his composure might have left him for, to the Hoosier lad, Morey Marshall, the hero of "In the Clouds for Uncle Sam," stood along side such operators as Wright and Curtiss in skilful daring as an aviator. There came a time when the two boys met and were glad to know each other.

"Ketch her," cried Bud sharply. Almost before any one knew what had taken place, twenty willing hands had the sinking car in their grip. While it was still in the air, supported by the proud volunteers, Bud drew his feet from his stirrups, caught the framework and dropped nimbly to the ground. Hundreds of persons were already massed around the mysterious craft. One after another turned to speak to or shake the hand of Bud, but, somehow, when President

Elder at last reached the spot, out of breath, Bud was gone.

And, strangely enough, although it was early in the afternoon, the aeroplane had no sooner landed than Mrs. "Stump" Camp and her son, Josh, made their way to the hitch racks and hooked up the old sorrel. Another strange thing—they did not go home by way of Scottsville, but took the longer way east to the "slashings." About a half mile east of the road leading into the fair-ground, the old sorrel drew up, and Bud Wilson, considerably puffed by his long run through the intermediate cornfields, stepped out of a fence corner and climbed into the rear seat.

About eight o'clock the same evening, two boney horses drawing a gaudily-painted gypsy van passed over the Scottsville bridge toward Little Town. It was Jack Stanley on his way to take Sunday dinner with old "Stump" Camp.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PRIVATE OFFICE OF THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK.

The following Monday morning, an odd little caravan marched around the Scottsville public square toward the First National Bank. Old "Stump" Camp, in his black Sunday hat, and freshly shaven down to his lower cheeks where his wide-spreading whiskers began, led the group. By his side was Madame Zecatacas, the Gypsy Queen, her long earrings bobbing. Behind them, walked "Jack Stanley," her son-in-law, and his wife. Their child was, at that moment, assisting Mother Camp to sugar doughnuts, eight miles away at Camp's Mill.

"Stump" Camp was not ignored at the First National Bank, and when he escorted his followers into that austere financial institution and asked to see President Elder, he was led into the latter's private office at once. What followed behind the closed door in the next twenty minutes or so was a question that more than worried the bookkeeper, cashier and clerk, Lafe Pennington, in the outside room.

"I don't want to borry no money," began Mr.

Camp when President Elder greeted him with the usual banker's coolness. "Nor I ain't come to pay none."

The banker made courteous offers of chairs to all.

"These air some ole friends o' mine," went on the mill owner, selecting a chair near a cuspidor, "an' they 're a goin' to help me help some one else."

"Well, Camp, what can I do for you? Tradin' horses again?"

The farmer-miller shook his head.

"Me an' you knowed Bud Wilson's father, Josiah."

"Very well," responded the banker. "And I 've just come to know the boy."

"So 've I," exclaimed Mr. Camp, drawing over and using the cuspidor. "That 's the pint. An' to keep to the pint, I got to tell you somepin' mebbe ye don't know. Bud's father was a neighbor o' mine, as ye might say. An' we farmers sort o' keep clost watch o' each other. When ye knowed Mr. Wilson, he lived in town."

"Then he bought a farm out your way—out about Little Town."

"He did. An' what 's curious, he paid for it—

cash—four thousand eight hundred dollars for eighty acres.”

The bank president seemed to be thinking.

“I suppose it ’ll be Bud’s when the boy ’s of age?” he suggested, at last.

“They ain’t no title to it,” remarked old Camp, with a judicial air.

“That ’s what I was trying to recall,” said Mr. Elder. “Seems to me I ’ve heard Attorney Stockwell say so.”

“There ye air,” exclaimed the bewhiskered mill owner, rising and striking the table. “Stockwell! There ye said it. He ’s this boy’s gardeen an’ ought to be lookin’ out fur him ef all ’s on the square. Why ain’t he cleared the title to that land? Why ain’t he, the old skin? I ’ll tell ye why, Mr. Elder. He don’t want to.”

“How ’s that,” asked the bank president, leaning forward, with interest.

“Anybody goin’ to buy that land offen the boy when he gits it ’thouten a title?”

“I reckon not,” ventured Mr. Elder.

“There ye said it,” snapped Mr. Camp, his whiskers vibrating in his excitement. “No one exceptin’ his gardeen mebbe fur little nor nuthin’.”

"You mean that the boy's guardian has neglected this to injure the title to the property?"

"When the boy comes o' age, the farm 'll be his. He ain't no farmer, nur don't want to be. He 'll put the track up fur sale. Who 'll buy it? Nobody—exceptin' the gardeen—Mr. Lawyer Cyrus Stockwell, an' at his own price."

"Well," asked Mr. Elder, leaning back into his chair, "what good will it do him? Won't be worth any more to him, will it?"

"Onless he turns around an' finds the persons 'at kin give him a title. But he won't. Them folks is right here. They air a goin' to make a deed right here this mornin', an' it 'll run to Bud Wilson. They air a goin' to sign the dockyment right here that 'll make Bud's farm worth one hundred and twenty-five dollars an acre o' any man's money."

Then, while the interested banker followed old "Stump's" explanation eagerly, Mr. Camp told how Jack Stanley and his wife, the direct heirs of William Reed and his wife, who had failed to properly transfer the property to Bud's father, weré ready and even eager to see justice done. They were prepared to sign a deed at once.

The keen, business man drew a long breath, and looked long and hard at the silent gypsies.

"Camp," he said at last, "how 'd you work this out?"

"Jack Stanley" spoke, for the first time.

In his rough way he told of his brief acquaintance with Bud from the time the boy came to him at midnight for coffee; how Bud had interfered to protect his mother-in-law from insult; how the boy had treated them as "white people," and finally recalled to the bank officer and fair director how Bud had come to the rescue of himself and old Madame Zecatacas when they had been so unjustly arrested.

"That 's right," mused Mr. Elder, "we could n't do a thing with him till we got you out. He 'd work for us for nothin', but not till we got you out of jail."

"Did n't I tell you," exclaimed Jack to old Zecatacas. "Ain't he on the square for fair? Dat 's why, mister."

The wrinkled Gypsy Queen smiled.

"He is our friend," she added in a broken voice. "To his friend, the gypsy gives all."

"I ain't no Romney," added the man, shaking his head, "but the kid 's all right. It 's comin' to him, and we're goin' to see he gets a square deal."

President Elder sat silent for a few moments,

and then drew Mr. Camp to the far side of the room.

“Camp,” he began, curiously, “what ’s your interest in this boy?”

It was Mr. Camp’s chance. While the tobacco-chewing and illiterate mill owner rapidly related the story of the last two days, the dignified bank president chuckled, grinned, and finally burst into loud guffaws.

“And the joke of it is,” he said, when Mr. Camp had finished, “that Bud’s fright on the last day was altogether unnecessary. The machine is ours. The company accepted our offer by telegraph, waived their representative’s fee and called him off.”

“But Bud seen him waitin’ with the deputy,” insisted the mill owner.

“And I had the telegram to call him off in my pocket,” explained Mr. Elder.

“Then he wa’n’t goin’ to be arrested?”

Mr. Elder shook his head, and laughed again.

“Well,” said Mr. Camp dolefully, “ye might as well kill a feller as skeer him to death.”

Mr. Elder paced the floor a few moments. Then he asked:

“Where is Bud?”

"I 'd a brung him, but we was scart he 'd be put in jail. He 's down to the livery stable."

"Can't you all come back here in an hour" asked Mr. Elder after another pause, "and bring Bud with you?"

"That 's our business to-day," chuckled Mr. Camp.

When they had gone, the bank president sat back in his chair as if in deep thought for some minutes. Then he took his hat and walked hastily out of his room and through the bank. Mr. Elder went directly to the county courthouse. There, after using the telephone, he was joined by a lawyer—but not Attorney Cyrus Stockwell. Then the two men hastened to the private office of the judge of the county court, after which they went to the office of the attorney who had been summoned by telephone.

From this office, another telephone message was sent out, and in response to that, Attorney Cyrus Stockwell was soon hastening toward Mr. Elder's lawyer's office. Here there was apparently an animated conference. When President Elder finally made his way back to his own office, it was fifteen minutes after the appointed time. "Stump" Camp, Bud and their gypsy friends were waiting patiently under the bank awning.

With only a hasty grip of Bud's hand, Mr. Elder led the party into the private office once more. He motioned them to chairs, and then, with a quick business air, drew out a deed, legally describing the Reed-Wilson farm and arranged it for the Stanleys to sign. They did it with apparent pleasure. Then he read it aloud. The consideration named was one hundred and fifty dollars. Bud pricked up his ears.

"Mr. Stanley," explained the banker, "your friend Bud has some peculiar business ideas. He has just saved our fair association a good deal of trouble. He did n't save us any money, but we 've concluded that he saved our pride, and we agreed Saturday night to pay him three hundred dollars for what he 'd done."

Bud tried to speak.

" 'T ain't your time, yet, young man," interrupted the banker. "I 'm goin' to pay these honest people one hundred and fifty dollars for their trouble in comin' in here."

Mr. Elder stepped out into the banking room, and a moment later returned with two packages of one hundred and fifty dollars each. One he handed to "Jack Stanley."

"And now," he added to the gypsies, "if you folks would like to do a little shoppin' before you

start back to the country, I 'd like a few minutes' talk with Bud and Mr. Camp."

Stanley hesitated and looked at his mother-in-law, Madame Zecatacas. The latter turned toward Bud. The boy, hardly knowing what to do, paused a moment, and then, holding out his hand, pointed to his "good luck" ring, which he still wore. Stepping to Stanley, Bud took the package of money and pressed it into Madame Zecatacas' hand.

"Here, Mrs. Zecatacas, I don't hardly know what this all means, but this is from me to you. And 'good luck' with it."

With dignity, the three gypsies slowly left the room.

For a moment, President Elder sat and drummed on the table with his fingers.

"Bud," he said at last, "you seem to have the sudden faculty of making good friends. These good people—including my old friend Camp here—are no better friends of yours than I am. When I see any one gettin' the worst of it, I want to give 'em a lift. That right 'Stump'?"

"That 's my motto."

"Well," went on the banker, "you 've been gettin' the worst of it, Bud. You 're eighteen

years old, and you 've got the stuff in you to do things. But you 've got to get an education."

Bud smiled and shook his head doubtfully.

"Mr. Camp tells me Mr. Stockwell has put you out of his house, and that you are going to live with him."

"If he 'll let me," said Bud. "But he can't keep me for nothing. I 'll have to work, and while I 'm workin' I can't go to school."

"Are you through the grammar school?"

"That 's all," confessed Bud, his face reddening. "I never seemed to get ahead. I was always in trouble, and whenever I seemed to be gettin' a start, Mr. Stockwell would take me out an' put me to work a spell. Even ef I had the money, I ain't never goin' to the high school here. I 'm too old."

"What would you like to do?"

"I could go to the normal school, over to Green County, in the winter an' work for Mr. Camp in the summer."

"What 'd that cost you?"

"Cost him 'bout eight dollars a week. Josh figured on it," answered Mr. Camp.

"Well," said Mr. Elder, throwing himself back into his chair, "you can do that!"

Bud gulped.

"I been doin' a little hasty investigatin' while I was out. What I found out I got to look into further, but it 's nigh enough right I reckon to make it worth tellin'. Mr. Stockwell, as your guardian and the executor of your father's estate, ain't made but one report to the court in ten years. Two years after your father died, he reported that he 'd been rentin' the farm at six dollars an acre, cash rent. That meant four hundred and eighty dollars a year, or nine hundred and sixty dollars for the two years. Agin that, he offset one hundred and twenty dollars for taxes, five hundred and twenty dollars for your board and clothes, and two hundred and forty dollars 'for fences an' repairs.' The court allowed it. Since that time, he ain't made no report."

Bud wrinkled his brow in an effort to comprehend. But old "Stump" Camp understood and chuckled.

"The fences don't need rebuildin' very often," went on Mr. Elder, "and, allowin' the same amount for your board an' clothes, I figure that Mr. Stockwell must owe you considerable more than one thousand dollars."

"He has n't got it to pay," exclaimed Bud at once thinking of Mrs. Stockwell. "An', besides, I don't want it. He was n't very bad to me."

"That 's for the Court to say," continued Mr. Elder. "At least, since you 're not living with him now, there 's anyway over five hundred dollars a year comin' to you from that land from now on."

"And," added Mr. Camp, crossing the room to the cuspidor, and parting his flowing beard, "in three years, when you git yer edication, there 'll be the eighty acres. I 'll give you ten thousand dollars fur it."

"Mr. Elder," said Bud at last, his voice choking, "I told you one day last week I wanted to do something in this town because I wanted to 'make good.' "

The pleased and smiling banker looked at him. Then he pointed to the package of one hundred and fifty dollars on the table.

"That shows you made good with us," he said, as Bud stood looking at the money.

"I did n't mean that," Bud exclaimed with feeling. "I wanted to 'make good' with some one that counted. If I 'made good' with you and with Mr. Camp, I 'm satisfied—I 'm happy."

"Let 's all go down to my house for dinner," said Mr. Elder, turning away abruptly as if to change the subject.

"I can't," answered Bud, picking up the package of bills. "I want to go right out and give this to Mrs. Stockwell. Mr. Camp," he added, as he grasped the old man's hand, "I 'll be waitin' at the livery stable fur you as soon as I kin git back."

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